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Language and Literacy in Canada

Report to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
of a workshop held in Toronto, October 19 and 20, 1979



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
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May 1980

Foreword

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council is pleased to present these working papers as a report of its Strategic Grants workshop on Language and Literacy in Canada, held in Toronto on October 19 and 20, 1979.

Readers will note that the papers have been reproduced, without overall copy editing, as they were received from the authors, in the interests of producing a timely document. We do not think the ideas and suggestions lose any of their import, for all that.

The views expressed in the papers are, of course, those of the authors, and distribution by the Council does not imply endorsement. We welcome them, however, as a valued contribution to our ongoing discussions of possible research topics for our Strategic Grants program.

André Fortier
President

May 1980

REPORT ON "LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN CANADA"

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Preamble

Scope

We understood our subject to be the whole question of command over language, whether spoken or heard, written or read. We took as our premise that such command over language is no mere social grace, but the foundation of civilized society.

The term "literacy," we agreed, must embrace a range of ascending skills, extending from the simple ability to read a Stop sign (functional literacy) all the way to what we called "humane literacy" -- the ability to read with comprehension and judgment the works of the best practitioners of the language, philosophers and poets in all their guises. We established further that no particular aspect could be properly considered in isolation, only as part of the continuum.

Areas of Concern

Our discussions repeatedly focussed on three main areas of concern.

First: the subject is so broad and complex that no one knows precisely how much is known about it; there is accordingly an urgent need for trans-disciplinary studies and collations of studies, and for close co-operation among researchers working on all its aspects. It is entirely possible, for instance, that some of our specific proposals may refer to research already in progress or well advanced, unknown to members of the workshop. We were of course in no position to attempt a systematic weeding out of such proposals.

Second: the developing of command over language is imperilled both by misinformation among educators, and by a variety of social and cultural influences, posed for example by the popular press, the economics of

publishing, the merchandising of entertainment, and the visual media (television, film, illustrations). This situation naturally causes alarm among academics; one surprising feature of our discussion was the degree to which this alarm was shared, and deepened, by speakers from outside Academe. Third, and most important in terms of "national concern": citizens who are handicapped in language and literacy cannot be free, effective members of a democratic society. Quite recent studies, noted in the press, have drawn attention to the extent of functional illiteracy among Canadians, as in other countries where mass education has likewise been long established. Our exchanges also made clear the extent to which educated and successful members of our society are insecure in their everyday tasks of communicating precise instructions and opinions in writing, and conscious of their insecurity.

The Place of Literary Criticism

We learned gradually to recognize literary criticism as a central and basic form of research in literacy -- comparable to "pure" research in the sciences, and no less tricky to justify among practically-oriented people. As one of our participants said, "Research on language and literacy must be encouraged at many levels of analysis and by means of many methodological tools associated with several different disciplines. These perspectives on language and literacy include linguistic, ethnographic, sociological, psychological, educational, cultural historical, and literary critical perspectives." Most of our research recommendations will focus upon specific and limited proposals, parallel to applied scientific research projects; but we make the general observation here that humane research, principally literary criticism, must be encouraged and supported because it is essential in creating the climate of literacy. We stress this point for two reasons. First, the connection (between literary scholarship and general literacy) is less likely to be perceived than

the relevance of research into the nature and structure of language, as conducted by philologists, psychologists, or philosophers. Second, literary critics and scholars belong, as another of our members put it, to a "demoralized profession," which feels itself to be misunderstood and forgotten in a time of economic pressure and practical urgency. And yet, whatever else they do, it is their task to act as guardians, interpreters, even arbiters of the literate use of language.

Urgency

It is true that complaints about the decline of literacy have been heard at intervals during Western history, as far back as the time of Socrates. Nevertheless, we agreed that the Council was wise to single out this area as one of national concern. Generally, we concurred in the view that literacy in our time and place is under siege by an unprecedented combination of "anti-word" pressures. So rapid is the pace of change, and so complicated the scene, that unless these influences are understood and counteracted, it would not be over-dramatic to forecast a condition in which social order and culture have slid, scarcely noticed, into unrecognizable forms; in which rational discourse would no longer be available as a tool for decision and a basis for action; and from which recovery would be extremely difficult if not impossible.

Role of the Council

We recognize that the Council's job is to select and support research projects, rather than to encourage practical action. But given the circumstances already outlined, we accepted this role with a degree of reluctance: we could not suppress the feeling that if Council has gone so far as to identify areas of national concern, a broadening of its role in implementing recommendations in such areas would be natural and welcome. Our concern took the form of several questions. Would the Council respond to and comment upon workshop

reports? Would it take the initiative in setting up research committees and projects, rather than await proposals that might fit its program? Would it maintain some form of continuing dialogue with the members of its workshops, after their immediate task was done? Would it help create tools or conditions to promote research, especially research of unconventional kinds (such as projects involving quite distinct disciplines)? Would it consider the possibility of contacting other organizations with different missions, for instance the CBC, with a view to putting the problem in its full scope before the public?

These may be thought unusual suggestions; but as we considered what had been justly defined as a matter of national concern, we repeatedly had the sense that the situation called for a creative response *in addition to* the support of academic research.

Further Steps

In our view, the workshop on Language and Literacy in Canada reflected a healthy spectrum of opinion and expertise, and has made a respectable start. The group comprised not only literary scholars (in English and French), but also members of such fields as lexicography, psycho-linguistics, anthropology, classics, social history, art, computer science, and academic administration; in addition, representatives of the press and television, publishing, creative authorship, and educational boards brought highly useful and provocative perspectives to bear. We think our diagnosis should be further sharpened by a continued canvassing of informed people both within the humanities and without; such consultation should also improve the general awareness of the problems. In particular, since unforeseeable accident prevented us from achieving adequate representation of French-speaking Canada, we recommend that a further workshop be convened with a specifically

francophone bias (and some kind of organic continuity, as might be secured by the participation of M. Gilles Bibeau).

We would likewise welcome the publication and distribution of this report to a constituency as wide as practicable -- teachers at various levels, university departments, boards of education, appropriate members of provincial ministries, members of the news media, selected public and business organizations -- with an explicit invitation to comment. As a glance at business periodicals and letters to the editor will confirm, literacy is more than an academic concern.

* * *

Explanations and Acknowledgments

The five major papers reproduced as Appendix 2 were delivered on Friday October 19th, each followed by a short general discussion. On the morning of October 20th, the remaining participants gave brief position papers or statements; some of these are reproduced in Appendix 3. The afternoon was taken up with general discussion and the formulating of recommendations. I wish to express the members' thanks to the Council for the opportunity to explore a subject close to their hearts; my own thanks to the participants for their wisdom, hard work, and good humour; and my special gratitude to my colleague Gordon Coggins for his invaluable assistance in organizing the workshop and this report.

Michael Hornyansky

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS: RESEARCH PROPOSALS

As may be anticipated from the Preamble, the workshop arrived at a wide range of recommendations, some growing directly out of papers delivered, others produced or implied by the ensuing discussion. They have since been circulated to all members of the workshop and have been tacitly or explicitly approved. For clarity's sake we have organized them in categories. The prefatory note (italicized) in each case sketches the matrix of considerations and questions from which the group of proposals arose. The order of categories does not indicate our notion of priority; but within each category we have made some effort to rank our priorities in descending order. Given the variety of interests represented, it goes without saying that not every member of the workshop would wholly endorse the classification or the exact order of importance.

I. Collation of Data

The field covered by "Language and Literacy" is vast, and has implications in many disciplines besides the humanities. We need to establish how much is already known and under investigation, in order to keep interested people (educators, scholars, and others) informed, to reduce duplication of research, and to suggest further directions of inquiry.

Item 3 arises from the case persuasively argued by Professor Hoggart, that the times cry out for an authoritative single study of the whole subject, which would set it against its social, philosophical, and cultural background, and which might well shape opinion (and action) in ways that more conventional research does not aspire to do.

1. A task force project, to be located at some central institution: to collect, collate, and evaluate existing data from research in all disciplines relevant to language and literacy; to make it readily available to interested scholars; and to devise continuing instruments for this function.

2. Collection, collation, and analysis of the existing information accumulated by universities with respect to their admission tests and remedial programs in language (including practical difficulties in implementing the latter).
3. Funding for a major scholar to examine the whole field of language and literacy, setting it in its social and cultural context.
4. A study to collate and compare practices in liaison between colleges and universities and the secondary schools, with a view to providing a basis for effective liaison.

II. Testing

Many voices complain about falling levels of literacy; but we cannot properly assess the situation unless we know what criteria are being used. Do the judgments of Professor A testify to the same shortcomings as those of Professor B, 30 or 3000 miles away? Are the results of Test P truly comparable with those of Test Q? Is it demonstrable that girls are apter at mastering language than boys? (We do not recommend the phrase "language competence," except for its brevity.)

5. An evaluative study of existing tests for language competence; one result should be the establishing of tests which can be widely used for purposes of comparison.
6. A national study of language competence among students, classified by sex, level of education, family background, geographical location.
7. Comparative testing of university students' language competence
 - (a) on entering, (b) at the end of Year I, (c) at the end of Year II,
 - (d) on graduation. (*Matrix: Year I language programs are offered or required at some Canadian universities; studies in the U.S. suggest that these produce an improvement in Year I, followed by a falling curve in later years.*)
8. A study testing the language competence of teachers' college graduates.
9. A study of language competence among university and college teachers.

III. Psycholinguistics

How is language learned? How do studies of brain functions, perception, and psychological development illuminate the process? How could the learning of language be improved? What are the psychological implications of illiteracy?

10. Studies to test the hypotheses of current research in neurolinguistic processes, in practical work with young children.
11. Research in the relationships between oral competence and the acquiring of competence in written language: with a view on the one hand to improving techniques for teaching written language, and on the other to seeing how far thinking is independent of competence in written language. The one side has direct application to educational strategies; the other has implications for job training and social judgments.
12. Studies on the relation of language and pictures in learning, and the use of pictures in language learning.
13. A study of the psychological/neurological/biological condition of illiterates who are competent in spoken language.
14. A study of small children's reactions to various linguistic changes in the reading aloud of familiar nursery rhymes or stories. (How soon, in what ways, does the notion of the "official text" enter our awareness?)

IV. Curriculum

How is language actually being taught, especially in the early years? We were agreed that social changes, mainly in family structure and home life, are affecting the learning of language; and we suppose that the less happy effects might be counteracted by changes in classroom approaches. This category has connections with IX and X below.

15. A study of existing curricula in language learning, from kindergarten through secondary school, examining the focus and sequence.

16. A study of the effects of teaching the history of the language in elementary and secondary school, and development of curricula to promote such learning.
17. A study to examine the effect on their language competence of reading poetry to young children.
18. Development of a guide to nursery rhymes and verse for kindergarten and primary teachers.

V. Textbooks

Two main concerns came to the fore. Textbooks appear to enjoy an authority equal to or greater than the teacher's, almost regardless of their style and content. And there are frequent complaints about the inappropriateness of imported textbooks, used even in university courses.

19. A study of what makes a good textbook, for various purposes and at various levels.
20. Studies of textbooks currently in use: their language (level of difficulty, level of interest); what effects they can be seen to have; the effect of illustrations.
21. A study of the effect upon students' language development of textbooks written by authors with a cultural matrix different from the reader's.

VI. Libraries and Reading Habits

What books are readily available to the Canadian reader, at school and later on? Parents and other visitors complain of a sameness and impoverishment in the contents of school libraries and bookrooms -- which often rely on Reader's Digest and script-of-the-movie books. Book reviewers have an important function in guiding the reader: how well, how fairly, where, by whom, is the reviewing done? "Many good Canadian books never get reviewed where I can read about them."

22. A study of representative school libraries across the country, to determine comparative holdings, how they are added to, how they are funded.

23. An evaluative study of the kinds of books available in Canadian bookstores, public libraries, and school libraries.
24. A study of what books are being read across the country, classified by age, sex, geographical location of readers.
25. Book reviewing: a survey of the frequency, completeness, and quality of book reviewing across the country, whether in local papers or magazines, or even in learned periodicals. (Do Canadian books get adequate consideration? Is the reviewer identified--credentials, relation to the author?)

VII. Teaching Methods

Have methods of teaching language, spoken and written, kept pace with discoveries about the process? How far is literacy a concern with teachers in subjects outside the official "English" or "Français" class? Is sufficient attention given to understanding the emotional, non-informative uses of language?

26. A critical review of methods of language teaching taught in teachers' colleges.
27. A study of the effectiveness of various marking and correcting techniques (of the teacher) on the improvement of students' competence in writing.
28. A study of the methods (actual, and recommended) for teaching affective, manipulative, or propagandistic language.
29. A survey of the extent and kinds of writing done in schools, in subject areas other than English (or French, in francophone schools).

VIII. Native and Second Languages

It is a truism that young children learn second languages more readily than students in their teens: how soon should the opportunity be offered, and how soon is it offered? How true is the frequent assertion that learning a second language enhances competence in the mother tongue? And how well served are the speakers of indigenous languages, such as Inuktituk?

30. An inquiry into the place (actual, and recommended) of second-language study beside the mother tongue, in elementary school grades.
31. An examination of the effects of knowing or studying a second language upon competence in the mother tongue.
32. Development of an accurate and objective glossary for Inuktituk, for the use of speakers learning to write the language. Exploration of comparable needs among speakers of Amerindian languages in Canada.

IX. The Media

The press, radio, and television are inevitably regarded by many people as the custodians, or at least reliable users, of language. It was argued, most trenchantly by our speakers representing those professions, that they do not discharge this function; that the training, e.g. of journalists, and the critical supervision, e.g. of newspaper and broadcast language, is inadequate. There was considerable discussion of the effects of television watching/addiction upon both language and thinking, and of the fate of the word in a culture increasingly dominated by the picture or image (see Vincent Tovell's paper, Appendix 2).

33. A comparative study of the language used by national newspapers, local newspapers, the Canadian Press.
34. A study of speech usage on CBC radio and TV over an extended period (comparing current programs and archives).
35. An evaluative study of degree versus diploma programs in journalism; how do their graduates compare in literacy, in general education, in usefulness to the profession?
36. Study of the effect of extensive television and film viewing upon verbal skills and logical reasoning powers. Are different kinds of ability involved in visual and aural learning?
37. A study testing vocabulary recognition among television watchers, analyzed accordingly to frequency of usage, phonemics, etymology.
(See the Kinloch study, Appendix 3.)

X. Language and Society, General

A flexible category for various social implications. How secure is the educated Canadian in his command of language? Do most Canadians consider literacy and clarity of speech important? Is the average voting citizen equipped to defend himself against specialized uses of language by various power- and pressure-groups? The later recommendations in this section should be seen as complementary to section IV above. We have not included a specific recommendation to examine functional illiteracy in Canada, because this kind of research seems to be well in hand.

38. A study of the language usage of educated, successful professional and managerial people in Canada, including their own perceptions of their competence or inadequacy; with a view to identifying inadequacies and implying strategies for overcoming them.
39. Studies of various specialized languages or jargons, such as those used with computers, by bureaucrats, about pop culture, in education.
40. A study of societal motivations and inhibitions with respect to clear speech and literacy.
41. A study of the effects of various models of "parenting" on the language competence of school entrants.
42. A study of the effect on language competence of a decline in family conversation, e.g. at meal times.
43. A study of the effect of diet, including the maternal pre-natal diet, upon language learning and competence.

XI. General Recommendations

The grounds for these are fully set forth in the Preamble.

44. We recommend that a further workshop or atelier on the same theme be convened, with a specifically francophone focus. (Heartily endorsed by M. Bibeau.)
45. We recommend that more generalized humane research and scholarship, notably literary criticism, be recognized and supported by the Council even in the

present context, insofar as it plays an essential role in establishing the climate of literacy.

Appendix 1

PARTICIPANTS

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Paul Audley.	Consultant and policy analyst in cultural industries for Secretary of State and Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation.
Walter Avis.	Professor of English and Dean of the Canadian Forces Military College, R.M.C., Kingston.
Gilles Bibéau.	Docteur en Linguistique, professeur agrégé, U. de Montréal.
Gordon Coggins.	Associate Professor of English, Brock University.
Harry Edinger.	Associate Professor of Classics, University of British Columbia.
Paul Fleck.	President, Ontario College of Art.
Patricia Gallivan.	Associate Professor of English, University of Alberta.
Joseph Gold.	Professor of English, University of Waterloo.
Richard Hoggart.	Warden (Principal) of Goldsmiths' College, University of London.
Michael Hornyansky (Chairman).	Professor of English, Brock University.
Peter Hunt.	Recently Professor of English and English Education at St. Francis Xavier University.
Ivan Kalmar.	Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of Toronto.
Harvey Kerpneck.	Associate Professor of English, St. Michael's College, University of Toronto.
A. Murray Kinloch.	Professor of English, University of New Brunswick.
Fiona Nelson.	Chairman, Toronto Board of Education.
Colin Norman.	Chairman of Undergraduate Studies, Department of English, Queen's University.
David Olson.	Professor of Educational Psychology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
F.E.L. Priestley.	Professor Emeritus, Department of English, University of Toronto.
Philip Smith.	Professor, University of Waterloo, Faculty of Arts; Director, Arts Computing Office.
Geoffrey Stevens.	Associate Editor, <i>The Globe and Mail</i> Ottawa Bureau.
Vincent Tovell.	Executive Producer, CBC television (Arts, Music and Sciences).
Adele Wiseman.	Writer, teacher.
Michael Swan.	Professor and Head of Department of Greek and Roman Studies, University of Saskatchewan. (Observer)

ALSO INVITED

The following had planned or hoped to take part in the Workshop, but were prevented by illness or previous commitments.

Gerardo Alvarez. Professeur de Didactique des Langues, Université Laval.

Geoffrey Durrant. Professor of English, University of British Columbia.

Sandra Witelson. Professor of Psychiatry, McMaster University.

Appendix 2

Major Papers, Oct. 19, 1979

LA PERSPECTIVE FRANCOPHONE DU PROBLÈME DE "LITERACY":
ASPECTS FACTUELS, ASPECTS PROBLÉMATIQUES

par

Gilles Bibeau

Université de Montréal

Introduction

La question de la langue et de la "literacy" est une question fort complexe qui implique à peu près tous les domaines des sciences humaines.

Au Québec, la question se pose de la même manière que dans le reste du Canada et on peut penser, du moins à ce qu'on entend et aux diverses indications fournies par des travaux de recherches sporadiques, que la situation canadienne est semblable à celle des autres pays industrialisés. Chaque région a ses caractéristiques propres, mais le schéma paraît être le même partout. On peut, par exemple, trouver une proportion plus ou moins grande d'illétrés selon le statut socio-économique moyen de différentes régions, un niveau d'analphabétisme plus ou moins avancé selon certaines variables scolaires et selon l'application plus ou moins grande des lois sur la fréquentation scolaire, mais la plupart des pays industrialisés se plaignent des mêmes choses.

On se plaint par exemple du fait que les enfants qui sortent de l'école secondaire ne savent pas écrire leur langue maternelle correctement, que beaucoup d'enfants d'âge scolaire ont des difficultés dans leurs études parce qu'ils ne savent pas lire, et cette plainte s'applique de façon jugée encore plus dramatique à l'incapacité des enfants, des adolescents et même des étudiants de collège ou d'université de bien penser et de bien travailler intellectuellement.

Ceux qui ont examiné cette question jusqu'à maintenant, aussi bien dans ses termes les plus généraux que dans ses détails, éprouvent en même temps deux sentiments de malaise: un sentiment d'échec du système éducatif qui ne réussit pas à atteindre des objectifs qui paraissaient simples et normaux et un sentiment d'impuissance devant les correctifs éventuels à apporter à une situation souvent perçue comme catastrophique. Il y a, dans l'examen de ce problème, quelque chose que nous ne comprenons pas, beaucoup de choses que nous ne savons pas et encore plus de choses que nous ne faisons pas.

Le quelque chose que nous ne comprenons pas est lié de façon certaine au type de culture dans laquelle nous vivons et que nous n'arrivons pas à cerner parce qu'elle est en transformation radicale et qu'elle se développe dans la multiplicité. Les quelques choses que nous ne savons pas concernent la description exacte de la situation actuelle et les termes dans lesquels le problème se pose. Les choses que nous ne faisons pas c'est de prendre les moyens pour savoir tout ce qui est possible de savoir, ce qui pourrait sans doute nous permettre de commencer à comprendre.

1. Aspects factuels

Les aspects factuels peuvent comporter deux types de considérations: des considérations sur la situation telle qu'elle est perçue par différents groupes sociaux; des considérations sur la connaissance scientifique que nous avons du phénomène.

1.1 Les perceptions

On peut considérer les perceptions comme faisant partie des faits socio-linguistiques et psycho-linguistiques en ce qui regarde la langue et les différents niveaux d'alphanétisation. Parmi ces perceptions, on peut examiner les attentes, les attitudes et les opinions des Québécois à l'égard de la connaissance que doivent avoir leurs enfants dans le domaine linguistique.

Si on tente de résumer la situation, on doit penser qu'une bonne majorité de Québécois associent de façon directe le niveau d'instruction et le fait de savoir lire et écrire correctement. Si le slogan "qui s'instruit s'enrichit!" a été pris au sérieux entre 1965 et maintenant, on peut dire que les Québécois s'attendaient et s'attendent toujours à ce que l'école enseigne à écrire à leurs enfants. Les attentes sur la capacité de lire sont beaucoup plus diffuses parce que les effets de l'instruction dans ce domaine sont moins visibles, puisqu'il s'agit d'habiletés dites passives, mais je pense que nous pouvons affirmer que les Québécois comptent que leurs enfants sauront lire très tôt dans leur scolarisation. En général, les Québécois s'attendent à ce que leurs enfants en sachent beaucoup plus qu'eux, et cela non seulement dans la maîtrise

de la langue maternelle, mais également dans celle de la langue seconde.

L'attitude la plus marquante qui caractérise la très grande majorité des Québécois à propos de la langue est une attitude très normative à l'égard du type de français que les jeunes doivent apprendre. Il n'y a qu'à affirmer que le "joual" est un phénomène linguistique normal et que son système fonctionne aussi bien que n'importe quel autre système linguistique et qu'il satisfait les besoins courants de communication pour voir se lever les boucliers de toutes parts et se faire traiter de tous les noms, à partir de "vulgaire" jusqu'à "marxiste". Très peu de Québécois peuvent tolérer qu'on dise du bien du niveau populaire de leur langue. Ils se sont fait répéter très souvent et ont cru que ce "parler" était laid, vulgaire, déformé, rempli d'anglicismes et de mots grossiers, et ils résistent à un examen plus objectif de la situation. Les plus généreux acceptent qu'ils parlent eux-mêmes une sorte de joual alors que les moins généreux pensent qu'ils ne parlent pas le joual, mais un dialecte un peu vieilli: les uns et les autres ont beaucoup de mal à accepter que leurs enfants sortent de l'école sans connaître le mieux possible un français standard ou, tout au moins, comme l'Association québécoise des professeurs de français, un français standard d'ici.

Cette position majoritaire au Québec n'est cependant pas la seule et on rencontre de plus en plus de personnes qui, de façon

très logique d'ailleurs, considèrent que la question linguistique est associée très carrément à la question nationale et qu'il ne faut pas chercher à imiter le français-standard, et cela aussi bien dans la manière de parler que dans la manière d'écrire, mais qu'il faut plutôt tendre vers un parler "national" qui soit la forme d'expression du peuple québécois. Cette opinion va d'ailleurs jusqu'à l'excès: certains Québécois considèrent que le joual est la langue nationale des Québécois et que c'est elle qu'il faut favoriser.

1.2 Les connaissances scientifiques sur le sujet

Il y a quelques semaines est sortie de l'Office de la langue française une bibliographie analytique sur le français québécois par des auteurs, Conrad Sabourin et Rolande Lamarche, qui avaient publié, en 1974, une première bibliographie sur les recherches psycho-linguistiques et socio-linguistiques au Québec. Ces deux bibliographies prolongent la bibliographie linguistique du Canada français de Gaston Dulong , publiée en 1966. En feuilletant ces bibliographies et les listes de mémoires et de thèses préparés dans les Universités, on peut constater un certain nombre de choses sur les recherches faites au Québec sur la langue:

(1) chaque Université du Québec, à l'exception de quelques constituantes de l'Université du Québec, possède un ou plusieurs chercheurs qui travaillent activement à des études descriptives des différents aspects de la langue québécoise. A Sherbrooke, Normand Beauchemin

fait des analyses de la langue parlée en Estrie ainsi que des travaux méthodologiques sur la cueillette des échantillons linguistiques; à Québec, Gaston Dulong travaille depuis de nombreuses années sur la géographie linguistique du Québec; à l'Université de Montréal, Laurent Santerre et Gillian Sankoff, en collaboration avec un professeur de l'Université du Québec à Montréal, Henrietta Cedergren, travaillent sur la langue orale de la région Montréalaise tandis que une autre équipe de l'Université du Québec à Montréal travaille sur divers aspects phonétiques, syntaxiques et sémantiques du français québécois.

- (2) Des groupes de recherche gouvernementaux, comme l'Office de la langue française, le Conseil de la langue française ainsi que les directions générales de l'enseignement primaire, secondaire, collégial et supérieur du M.E.Q. subventionnent différents projets portant sur la langue.
- (3) En dehors du Québec, on trouve des travaux en Ontario, sous la direction de Raymond Mougeon, principalement dans les écoles, et sous la direction de Pierre Léon, à Toronto, sur la phonétique et sur certaines structures morphologiques du français parlé dans la région Torontoise, les travaux de Geneviève Massignon sur le français des Acadiens, en Nouvelle-Ecosse, et, dans les Maritimes, les travaux de Pierre Gérin.
- (4) Une masse très abondante de livres et d'articles sur la langue au Québec par différentes personnalités et comportant soit des développements d'ordre pédagogique sur l'enseignement de la langue, soit des considérations sur la norme, soit des listes

d'anglicismes et de tournures non conformes à la norme du français standard, soit des traités théoriques sur les relations entre la culture et la langue, etc.

Parmi ces quelques 4,000 titres, il n'y en a que quelques dizaines sur l'apprentissage de la lecture et de l'écriture, à l'exclusion évidemment des méthodes d'enseignement, et quelques-uns seulement s'intéressent à la description exacte du problème qui nous préoccupe: les niveaux de maîtrise de la lecture et de l'écriture.

On s'est intéressé beaucoup à la question de l'orthographe et du vocabulaire qui sont faciles à traiter parce que l'objectif final est bien connu, ou considéré comme tel, et que la marge entre la performance des enfants, des adolescents ou des adultes et ces objectifs est relativement facile à établir. Les travaux actuels les plus intéressants consistent à analyser le type de fautes d'orthographe que font les étudiants et de tenter de classer ces fautes à partir de certaines opérations mentales qui pourraient expliquer leur existence. C'est ainsi, par exemple, qu'on arrive à identifier l'origine de certaines fautes dans l'influence de la langue orale, dans l'application trop générale de règles de transcription des sons, etc. Peu de choses cependant sur la performance générale des étudiants dans des distributions de population correspondant aux strates sociales ou aux strates scolaires, sauf peut être l'enquête sur le français écrit dans les collèges (EFEC) par Louis Doucet et son équipe, qui a porté non seulement sur l'orthographe, mais également sur les écarts à la norme dans l'utilisation du vocabulaire, des

structures morphologiques et des structures syntaxiques.

En ce qui concerne la lecture, on utilise de plus en plus les tests de "closure" pour en évaluer le rendement pour des fins principalement pédagogiques, c'est-à-dire de définition d'objectifs et d'évaluation de l'enseignement. Plusieurs tentatives de comparaison entre différents résultats de recherches spécifiques et relativement limités ont tenté de nous donner une idée plus précise de la capacité de lire de nos enfants vers la fin de l'école primaire, mais cela se fait principalement avec des groupes moyens ou allégés qui présentent souvent des difficultés importantes.

La problématique elle-même de l'évaluation des capacités de lire n'est pas encore très au point et plusieurs pédagogues ou chercheurs se questionnent au moins dans deux axes différents: le premier est celui de la définition même de l'acte de lecture, le second celui des exigences que le système scolaire doit avoir en fonction du type de programme suivi par les enfants (par exemple les concentrations techniques ou professionnelles, les voies d'enseignement moyenne et allégée, les options scientifiques). La recherche la plus récente sur le sujet est sans doute celle que vient de terminer un étudiant de maîtrise de l'Université de Montréal et qui semble démontrer que, pour une bonne partie des enseignants, "savoir lire" signifie "savoir lire à haute voix" et que le jugement des enseignants sur la capacité réelle de comprendre un texte écrit est influencé par cette perspective. Dans le cadre de cette recherche, on a trouvé

que la plupart des enfants des voies moyenne et enrichie arrivaient assez bien à comprendre pour eux-mêmes des textes de leur niveau. La situation serait donc un peu moins dramatique qu'on ne le pense généralement, mais de nombreux problèmes restent encore à explorer, notamment celui de la relation entre les différents niveaux de textes en rapport avec les différents niveaux scolaires et, sans doute, celui de la définition du niveau de compréhension.

En résumé, on peut affirmer sans se tromper qu'il y a énormément d'intérêt pour la question, que de plus en plus de personnes sont aptes à faire de bonnes études de la situation, mais qu'il manque ce qu'on pourrait appeler une certaine forme de planification de la recherche dans ce domaine.

2. Aspects problématiques

Si on tente d'analyser le problème de la "literacy" et d'en comprendre les diverses composantes, il faut examiner au moins quatre types de variables qui peuvent jouer un rôle déterminant par rapport à l'acquisition du savoir lire et du savoir écrire. Il faut au moins soulever un certain nombre d'éléments scolaires, des éléments psychologiques, des éléments sociaux et des éléments linguistiques.

Toutefois, avant de nous arrêter à chacun de ces types d'éléments, on peut penser, comme le font Gilles Gagné dans une conférence récente à un Colloque sur la qualité du français au Québec et Christophe Hopper dans une recherche sur les dimensions historiques de la question linguistique au Québec, que nous ne sommes pas justifiés de nous inquiéter de façon excessive à ce sujet puisque, depuis quelques centaines d'années, on ne cesse de se plaindre à ce sujet avec le même type d'argument: les enfants ne savent pas lire et ne savent pas écrire. Il y aurait donc lieu d'examiner de façon plus précise le passé et les points de repères qui nous permettraient de nous faire une idée plus exacte de la situation, au moins dans les écoles où il y a de bonnes chances de trouver des documents, depuis au moins le début du siècle, pour voir dans quelle mesure nos alarmes actuelles ne sont pas les mêmes que celles de nos prédecesseurs. Il est possible en effet que l'accession de tous les citoyens à la scolarisation jusqu'à la fin du secondaire brouille les pistes de l'objectivité si l'on pense que la majorité des citoyens ne terminaient pas leur école primaire il y a à peine

trente ans. Pour nous alarmer, il faudrait pouvoir arriver de façon certaine à la conclusion que, toutes choses étant égales par ailleurs, la situation s'est détériorée et continue de se détériorer actuellement.

Ce questionnement historique ne doit pas nous empêcher cependant d'examiner les circonstances dans lesquelles sont placés les enfants d'âge scolaire par rapport à l'acquisition de la lecture et de l'écriture.

2.1 Examen des éléments scolaires

On ne peut pas, bien sûr, faire un examen systématique des éléments scolaires qui peuvent jouer un rôle dans l'acquisition du savoir lire et du savoir écrire, mais on peut rappeler un certain nombre d'éléments qui, compte-tenu de l'évolution de l'idéologie relative aux savoirs et à l'acquisition des connaissances de même que à ce que nous pourrions appeler la démocratisation de l'enseignement, peuvent influencer notre questionnement.

Ainsi, depuis plus d'une décennie, la langue orale a pris une importance beaucoup plus grande dans la salle de classe, de même que l'expression spontanée et les comportements reliés à la communication verbale instantanée, ce qui a eu pour effet certain de réduire considérablement le temps consacré à l'apprentissage de la lecture et de l'écriture. A cette réduction du temps à l'intérieur de la classe de français, il faut ajouter une réduction du temps de la classe de français elle-même par rapport aux autres matières scolaires. Si on en croit ce que

John B. Caroll pense de l'acquisition des connaissances, le temps consacré à l'apprentissage joue un rôle déterminant non seulement dans la quantité de connaissances acquises mais également dans leur qualité.

Une deuxième question très importante est sans doute celle de la distance de plus en plus grande entre les besoins tels que les enfants les perçoivent et les besoins tels que la société ou les parents les perçoivent. Nous évoluons lentement vers une conception paradoxale: d'une part nous voulons être très fonctionnels et très utilitaires, d'autre part nous voulons tenir de plus en plus compte de chacun des individus, de leur style d'apprentissage, des conditions dans lesquelles ils sont placés, des problèmes affectifs et autres, et nous voulons que chaque individu possède de plus en plus d'autonomie dans la classe. Ce paradoxe semble nous conduire vers une diminution du niveau d'exigences à l'égard des efforts consentis pour l'acquisition de connaissances tout en conservant des objectifs aussi élevés sinon plus élevés que ceux que nous avions auparavant. Tout en souhaitant une individualisation plus grande et un respect de chaque personnalité, nous continuons, comme auparavant, à maintenir une pédagogie normative qui attribue une grande importance à la faute et à la correction. Nous ressemblons, en cela, aux parents qui nous paraissent de moins en moins exigeants et encadrent de moins en moins leurs enfants mais qui n'en conservent pas moins, pour le système scolaire, une attitude critique qui nous embarque sans doute dans le même type de paradoxe.

Une des questions très importantes qui se pose avec beaucoup d'acuité actuellement au Québec, et, dans une moindre mesure, au Canada anglais, de même que dans plusieurs pays ou parties de pays occidentaux, c'est celle de la place de l'apprentissage de la langue seconde dans le programme scolaire. Des sondages relativement récents indiquent que les parents ont un niveau d'exigence relativement élevé en ce qui regarde l'acquisition de la langue seconde et il ne serait pas étonnant, si on se donnait la peine d'étudier leurs attitudes et leurs attentes, de trouver un bon nombre de Québécois francophones qui attachent autant d'importance sinon plus à l'acquisition de l'anglais qu'à celle du français.

Nous avons tendance à placer sur le dos de l'école une quantité énorme de nos attentes et nous oublions sans doute un peu de considérer que nos attentes sont parfois paradoxales, opposées, incohérentes et illusoires. Par ailleurs, l'école se montre extrêmement sensible à l'opinion générale et fait fluctuer ses programmes et ses objectifs en fonction des mouvements de pensée politiques et socio-politiques.

2.2 Examen des éléments psychologiques

Au temps de notre jeunesse, la psychologie était dans le bâton qui servait à nous faire marcher droit et les théories d'apprentissages de même que la considération des facteurs affectifs dans le comportement social ou intellectuel se manifestaient par des retenues après la classe, par des

défenses de participer aux activités sportives ou amusantes de l'école ou de la maison et on considérait, en général, qu'il y avait deux sortes d'enfants: les "bolles" et les "cruches". La situation a bien changé . Il n'y a plus de "bolles", ce sont des enfants surdoués ou tout simplement doués qui peuvent également se permettre de ne pas réussir, il n'y a plus de "cruches" non plus; il y a des enfants en difficulté d'apprentissage, des enfants en difficulté d'adaptation, qui peuvent d'ailleurs également se permettre parfois de réussir. Nous devons dire que nous préférons la façon moderne de procéder, même si cela est beaucoup plus compliquée.

Dans la compréhension des éléments psychologiques reliés à l'acquisition du langage et à celles de la lecture et de l'écriture, le mot "maturation cognitive" et le mot "maturation affective" ont fait un bout de chemin tel qu'il est sensé, aujourd'hui, de parler de difficultés d'apprendre à lire pour des raisons d'immaturité psychologique. Le mot n'a pas de sens péjoratif: il signifie tout simplement que l'incapacité de réussir est due aux faits que les structures cognitives ou les structures affectives n'ont pas atteint un niveau de développement suffisant pour que les habiletés reliées à ces acquisitions puissent se développer. Le mot "maturation" est actif et laisse penser que c'est une question de temps, et que cela viendra. Il est possible cependant, dans des cas un peu exceptionnels, que l'immaturité dure plus longtemps que pour la moyenne des enfants, située autour de 6 ans pour la lecture,

et que l'apprentissage de la lecture ne puisse se faire qu'imparfaitement ou que beaucoup plus tard.

La vie moderne bouscule autant les enfants que les adultes, et il n'est pas rare de trouver des facteurs affectifs perturbateurs qui privent les enfants d'une santé affective normale, comme le taux élevé de familles monoparentales, l'intervention de la télévision

qui occupe souvent une place très importante dans l'occupation du temps, les voyages en autobus pour aller à l'école, les attitudes des enseignants ou des autres écoliers, les nuits écourtées, etc. (Nous sommes toujours surpris de voir de jeunes enfants dans la rue après onze heures du soir, ce qui est assez fréquent à Montréal.) Ces conditions psychologiques, cela est de plus en plus admis, ont un effet important sur le succès scolaire, en plus des problèmes déjà connus reliés à la personnalité des enfants.

En lisant un jour un texte sur les relations entre la formation théorique et la formation pratique des enseignants et sur la place à donner à chacune de ces formations dans un programme universitaire, une idée s'est installée de plus en plus fortement en moi: si nous avons des problèmes à associer ou à dissocier la théorie et la pratique, c'est sans doute que la théorie n'est pas très bonne. Cette remarque à propos de la formation des enseignants nous paraît également valable pour l'étude du problème d'acquisition de la langue à l'école. Nous possédons, à travers nos enseignants et à travers nos manuels scolaires, des théories d'apprentissage contradictoires et incomplètes qui fournissent l'occasion de remettre constamment en question notre pratique de l'enseignement. Cela est également vrai à propos de nos recherches sur l'apprentissage. Si l'on

compare avec le domaine des sciences dites exactes, on trouve une assurance très grande dans la formation des chimistes, des physiciens ou des biologistes, du moins au niveau du premier cycle, alors que dans le domaine de l'éducation, on trouve une formation théorique essentiellement polyvalente et multiforme qui n'est pas sans causer des problèmes très importants sur la conception qu'un enseignant peut se faire de l'apprentissage et même de l'enseignement. Les enseignants véhiculent dans leurs classes des morceaux de behaviorisme, des morceaux de piagétisme, des morceaux de transformationalisme, des morceaux de structuralisme, etc.

2.3 Examen des éléments sociaux

C'est depuis les travaux de William Labov principalement, sur les Porto-Ricains de la ville de New-York et sur la langue des noirs aux Etats-Unis, que la sensibilité des chercheurs a été suscitée sur les variables sociales dans le comportement linguistique. Ces variables sont multiples et se joignent de façon évidente aux variables psychologiques dont nous avons parlé plus haut. Ainsi, les différentes situations dans lesquelles se trouvent des enfants jouent un rôle sûr la perception qu'ils ont de leur langue, sur les efforts qu'ils consentent à mettre sur son acquisition et sur les objectifs linguistiques que propose l'école. Dans la plupart des cas, l'influence de ces différents éléments se fait inconsciemment et conduit à des résultats qui paraissent souvent inexplicables. C'est ainsi par exemple que des enfants ayant un quotient intellectuel élevé, ayant toute la préparation requise et une stabilité émotive assez grande, échouent ou ont des difficultés très grandes dans l'acquisition de leur langue maternelle ou d'une langue seconde.

En général, on considère que les enfants de milieux défavorisés de même que les enfants appartenant à des minorités ethniques d'immigration récente rencontrent des difficultés relativement grandes quant à l'atteinte des objectifs que propose l'école. Ces difficultés sont issues de phénomènes psycho-sociaux encore assez mal connus mais qui correspondent assez clairement à l'identification sociale des individus et à leurs sentiments

d'appartenance plus ou moins grand à une communauté linguistique ou à une communauté politique donnée. Dans le domaine de l'éducation bilingue, par exemple, on arrive à une conclusion de plus en plus nette à l'effet que l'éducation bilingue est excellente pour les enfants de communautés majoritaires mais qu'elle présente des difficultés de plus en plus grandes lorsqu'elle est appliquée à des communautés linguistiques minoritaires ou à des milieux défavorisés. Il en est de même pour la langue maternelle où on constate des difficultés beaucoup plus grandes pour l'acquisition de la lecture et de l'écriture chez des enfants de milieux défavorisés ou de minorités ethniques que pour des enfants de milieux socio-économiques moyens ou favorisés ou encore pour la majorité ethnique.

La question fondamentale qui est posée à ce sujet est une question de sens à la fois socio-politique et psychologique. Les enfants, comme les citoyens, sont considérés de plus en plus par les mouvements sociaux comme des individus égaux ou encore devant avoir une égalité de chances devant la vie, devant le travail et devant le succès dans tous les domaines, alors que la pratique traditionnelle se voulait beaucoup plus élitiste. L'égalité des chances implique dans l'école un examen attentif des situations individuelles de départ aussi bien qu'un ensemble de stratégies plus ou moins individuelles pour que les mêmes objectifs puissent être atteints par tous les individus. Ainsi, un enfant de milieu défavorisé qui se présente à l'école doit avoir les mêmes chances qu'un enfant favorisé d'atteindre, à la fin de l'école, le même niveau de compétence

du moins en ce qui regarde les chances. Cela ne va pas sans créer d'immenses problèmes pédagogiques parce cela implique des jugements de valeurs sur la préparation des personnes, sur les stratégies utilisées aussi bien que sur les objectifs définis pour l'école.

La question des pressions du milieu pour l'éducation de type bilingue ou encore pour donner une place importante à l'apprentissage de la langue seconde est également un phénomène qui, tout en restant très fort, n'en est pas moins obscur. Beaucoup d'écoles ont admis certains postulats voulant que l'éducation bilingue ne soit pas nocive et n'ait pas d'effets secondaires en ce qui concerne soit la langue maternelle, soit l'apprentissage des autres matières scolaires, et ont fait démarrer des projets d'éducation bilingue qui subissent un encadrement exceptionnel, un support politique général à mon sens excessif, surtout si l'on considère que beaucoup de variables de l'éducation bilingue ne sont pas encore très connues. Ce type de pression socio-politique doit être pris en considération lors de l'examen de la problématique de l'apprentissage de la langue, de la lecture et de l'écriture.

2.4 Examen des éléments linguistiques

La question des éléments linguistiques mérite sans doute moins d'attention de notre part, puisqu'elle est déjà largement

connue. La question de l'écart entre l'oral et l'écrit a déjà fait l'objet de nombreux exposés et travaux qui ont eu le mérite immense de nous faire comprendre comment se manifestait cet écart et dans quelle mesure il était relativement grand. C'est ainsi que nous avons appris comment le code écrit est difficile, surtout si l'on pense qu'il a deux objectifs principaux : celui de reproduire le code oral et celui de tenir compte des conditions particulières dans lesquelles l'écrit se manifeste.

On arrive relativement bien à comprendre les caractéristiques du code oral, à tous les niveaux de la structure linguistique, par opposition aux caractéristiques du code écrit et à situer la nature des difficultés pédagogiques de l'enseignement et des difficultés d'apprentissage. Ce qu'on ne sait pas, et que la linguistique ne peut pas nous dire, c'est comment un individu parvient à décoder un texte écrit, ou bien à lire. Faut-il, pour parvenir à la lecture courante, apprendre à décoder les signes écrits un par un, en les mettant en rapport avec les signes oraux auxquels ils se réfèrent, ou bien est-il suffisant de trouver, dans l'écriture d'un ou de plusieurs mots, des points de repère qui permettent d'associer ce mot écrit à un mot oral correspondant ? L'entourage matériel des mots et leur disposition sur une page blanche jouent-ils un rôle déterminant dans le décodage ? La nature de la perception visuelle et la forme des caractères jouent-elles un rôle supplémentaire ou un rôle prépondérant ?

Que de questions ! Que de questions !

RECOMBINANT LANGUAGE: THE BIOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE

by

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"Speech is the best show man puts on." Benjamin L. Whorf

"Human language differs from all other systems of communication in that it allows the recombination of symbols to provide for effective transmission of a range of messages so large that many call it infinite." J. Z. Young

"I think the question arises in the case of language exactly as it does in the case of the eye, or the heart, or sexual organs (to pick something that matures long after birth), and so on.

"There is every reason to suppose that this mental organ, human language, develops in accordance with its genetically determined characteristics, with some minor modifications that give one language or another, depending on experience. But then, one would say the same about any bodily organ as far as I can see." Noam Chomsky

"Language molded on matter and on man's action on matter resulting in an instrument free from matter, a device to triumph over mechanism." Ashley Montagu

"Whatever we know about reality has been mediated, not only by the organs of sense but by complex systems which interpret and reinterpret sensory information." Ulric Neisser

"'What happens' occurs in many places throughout the world, and therefore many things go on at the same time. 'What happens' in literary expression may be events occurring at the same time. They cannot be related simultaneously.

Like all else, they must be given in some sequence. The 'sequentiality of literary expression' is a phrase that is mere abstraction for what we mean by a work or poem. A poem, the knowing of an expression, is necessarily a temporal process of cognition." Earl Miner

The battle would seem to be over, but who won the war? In Ontario at least, the milk and water liberalism that placed English alongside other school products on the shelves of the curriculum supermarket, has given way to the stronger drink of something called core curriculum, a fancy name for reading, writing and arithmetic. The soft sell came in the form of implicitly redefining English so that it came to be anything, including stage design and silent film. Even language succumbed to a ball-park meaning and included body movement, illustrations, music. The so-called "new" hard-sell regulations for fall 1979 call for 4 English credits and seem to expect that English will again be presented in the more conventional forms of reading, writing and grammar. We will quickly see the results of this return from exile, have probably begun to see them already: students will be able, by and large, to write in sentences, to know subject from predicate. So the ship of so-called literacy has not been abandoned. It has been salvaged, and leaking though it is, and barnacled and rusty, again it plows its weary way through uncharted seas. My own impression is that while more students can write "correct" sentences, they do not know what to write. The corpus of the language is breathing, but only with the aid of a life-support system, and our students flit around it in despair. Under their care the language twitches but doesn't get up and walk about; it gives no sign that it thinks or feels, and very clearly it doesn't create. Let students write about literature, say the academics in a grand fiat, but when students do write of what they read, they write to formula, or they plagiarize, or they glean from critics like hungry ants at a picnic. We train the life out of them. We are all good followers of Pavlov, and everyone barks on cue.

If I am right about this, we are compelled to reexamine what we mean by

"literacy" and revise the context and method of our instruction. Let us think of literacy as the measure of language skill reflected in reading and writing performance. Start with a brief survey of the virtues traditionally ascribed to reading: reading is our principal source of information, our primary source of ideas; reading continues the tradition of moral behaviour, of precept, guidance, counsel and law; reading teaches us our history, our sources, our origins, and our identity. Reading gives us pleasure, hope, escape and solace. These have been the givens, the assumptions to which all teachers subscribe. But how does reading do this? Can reading be separated from experience, from sensation, from sentiment? Love, grief, pain and pleasure, do these depend on literacy?

Words are not the primary or only source of our experience of fear or laughter, nor the stimulus for reproduction or creativity. I no longer find it fruitful or appropriate to celebrate language on the ground of moral virtues. I cannot see that there has been much improvement in human relations due to an increase in literacy. Inhumanity is just as widespread and profound now as ever. Children do not seem to be abused any less when their parents can read and write. Nazism took root in a literate culture. Hitler himself wrote a book. Indeed, increased literacy seems to generate a greater capacity for being manipulated. Which leads me to my major point: that we should shift our thinking about language from the moral imperative to the social imperative and the biological imperative.

You will see from the above that we have most often made the case for language skills on the basis of "communication." We say that the past communicates to the present, individuals communicate with each other. Language helps us to understand other human beings better. I

suggest that this is not necessarily the case. Language may be an effective barrier to understanding. Language may be used to confuse and is particularly effective in the arts of deception and double messages (see Laing & Esterson: Sanity, Madness & The Family). I do not believe that we are on very safe ground if we rest our case for language primarily on communication. In fact, by defining language falsely as "communication," false analogies to film, dance, finger painting have been possible and natural, because all of these arts do indeed communicate. The syllogism is false because the premise is false. It would be more accurate to say that language is a cognitive function and communication is one of its by-products. People must have something to communicate and that something is the stuff of language itself. On the other hand, human beings have no choice but to be linguistic. Man is the language animal. Our only possible direction is therefore in the increase or maximization of language skill rather than in a withdrawal from language on the grounds of despair. The object of this acquisition should, however, not be the service of some romantic notion of improved communication or the creation of a more harmonious world but the development of an individual's defence strategy against manipulation by deliberate or careless language transmission. A typical, though sophisticated, example of manipulation of public understanding quoted below is taken from the language of education advertising. The following is from the Toronto Board of Education Annual Report, January 1979. Remember that this has nothing whatever to do with actual education but is a public relations document designed to produce the impression that all is perfectly well.

Today, there is a swing back towards more structure. One cause of the back-to-basics trend is the publicity given

to claims that high school graduates are "illiterate." Oddly enough, the most comprehensive examination of high school graduates' skills ever conducted in Ontario, the Secondary/Post-Secondary Interface Studies, gave little support to this view. Rather, it supported our belief that young people are, as a whole, better educated than this age group as a whole ever was. People in universities often forget that their doors are open not just to the cream, as they were in the "good old days", but to the whole milk.

This statement is almost impossible to unravel. The clearest expression is that of barely-veiled acidity in the reference to whole milk, a drink which, it is implied, the universities with their carping professorial critics are reluctant to swallow, having been brought up on cream in the good old days of elitism. But none of this makes any sense at all. If students can't read and write effectively, then the appeal to the rhetoric of "better educated than ever" and "whole milk," won't help, and if they can do what is necessary, why the "swing back towards more structure"? The Board wants to be right, to save face and to change its curriculum in the wake of widespread criticism, all at the same time. To return to my main point, language is a strategy in the hands of wise men, fools, and wicked men. The individual cannot close his ears and eyes to the barrage of words. We should therefore educate ourselves and our children to the idea that we increase our store of words and language skills as a means of gaining liberty in a world of words. J.Z. Young offers this view:

"Finally the most important universal feature of all is the creativity or productivity of language. The fact that we can construct and understand an indefinitely large number of messages is the basis of the freedom of the individual to be different from others. This freedom is in turn the basis of the great adaptability of humans and of their cultures. (Programs of the Brain, Oxford Univ. Press, 1978, pp. 185-6)

The freedom to formulate one's own linguistic percept is also the protection against becoming someone else's percept. It is a defence against universal

programming and the creation of control and stasis. Orwell's 1984 is a warning about precisely such consequences. We must ask ourselves whether it is too late to heed it.

Language is the art of the survival of the fittest. Ulric Neisser puts it this way:

More generally, everything that a person learns makes him less susceptible to control. People with knowledge are necessarily harder to manipulate than those who lack it, for the same reason that skilled chess players are harder to beat than duffers. Truth does make us free. Real education is not primarily a technique for manipulating students, as some have suggested, but just the opposite. (Cognition and Reality, W.H. Freeman, 1976, p. 185)

Whether we are engaged in real education is quite another question, but it is the question for us. What applies to language is rendered obvious by Neisser's chess metaphor:

The information that specifies the proper [chess] move is as available in the light sampled by the baby as by the master, but only the master is equipped to pick it up. (Cognition, etc. pp. 180-1)

If I play chess against a master he will always win, precisely because he can predict and control my behavior while I cannot do the reverse. To change this situation I must improve my knowledge of chess, not of psychology. (Cognition, etc. p. 183)

Language is an inevitable defence strategy which increases the individual's power and freedom in a linguistic world, the human world. This brings us to the rôle of reading, writing and speech as educational factors in the development of language skills. Obviously these three activities are related functions of the same brain processes, though motor mechanisms and neural procedures differ. The effect of all three used together is probably an augmenting discipline in establishing the cognitive power of language. Writing and speech are peculiarly active processes in which normal speakers undertake to formulate linguistic structures that can be decoded accurately by a listener.

In the case of writing, the motor demands of this slowed-down rendering of language generate a special training in sentence and sequence formulation. Moreover, the feedback loop by which one sees and experiences in a material or visual form the product of one's own thought process, probably plays a rôle of inestimable significance in generating and enhancing a self and an identity. Dr. Young proposes that this experience of self through language is a defining characteristic of human brains.

Animals obviously recognize others, but the critical human stage was the acquisition of the power to make symbolic representation by language of concepts indicating the distinction between self and other. This allows expression to oneself as well as to others of the experiencing of the self and of the world, which we call being conscious. (Programs of the Brain, Oxford Univ. Press, 1978, p. 39)

Without knowing what the self is, our surest ground is to think in terms of the individual's total expression, an expression in which language occupies a central place. Writing almost certainly plays no small part in self-realization.

When we turn to reading we find an even more complex situation. Speaking and writing are normally limited to the present, are of limited duration and to a great extent under the subjects' control. Reading, on the other hand, comprises a recognition of the vast store of accumulated information compiled by everybody else. A library can, theoretically, contain all the possible strategies of perception that are not our own. The case for extensive reading, and especially for reading what we call literature, can, I believe, be based on what I call the biological imperative for survival, for fully human survival that is, or even more accurately, for prevailance, to borrow from William Faulkner's Nobel Prize acceptance speech. Of using literature for prevailance I shall have more to say in a moment.

My own view is that language is a function — or if one prefers Chomsky's term, an organ — that has evolved for the purpose of locating the user in relation to the experience of sense data. As far as I can see, all sense data are spatially experienced. Language is, I believe, somehow related to the generation of a sense of time. It is a code for locating the subject on a time-space grid. It does this by generating an intrinsically sequential code as a model for the temporal processing of space. Behind such a theory lies a whole complex of theoretical models and proposals on the dichotomy of hemispheric function and cerebral asymmetry.¹ Why should we have evolved such a strategy? Because the need for action and interaction with the environment requires a temporal ordering of the sense data, since action, that is reflective action rather than reflexive action, is somehow intrinsically connected with language.

Though it can be useful to speak of 'coding' and 'decoding' in this way we must be careful to avoid the conception that there is some final stage where the message is 'understood'. There is no central place in the brain where this occurs. The 'decoding' is completed only by action. A dog recognizes a bone by gnawing it. Even in ourselves the understanding of a meaning implies preparation for action. The very word 'understand' is the same as 'hypothesis' from the Greek 'to stand under'. The brain is continually making hypotheses that prepare for useful actions. (Programs of the Brain, p. 57)

This rather vague hypothesis is, like all theories of course, metaphor, but it may be helpful as a model for apprehending the strategy that is the object of language. Writing is a code for language. Language is a code for organizing

1. See Cita Ben-Dov and Amurain Carmon, "On Time Space and Cerebral Hemispheres: A Theoretical Note", Internat. J. of Neuroscience, Vol. 7, 1976, pp. 29-33, and the accompanying bibliography.

sense data so that a sequence of actions on a spatial ground is possible. If this seems vague, it seems to me less vague than the currently popular and unquestioned chatter about "communication." This latter, interaction between language animals, is a consequence of their having language. Other animals certainly communicate. Lovers, and indeed all of us, communicate perhaps even more accurately on occasion without language. We need to grasp the fundamental function of language in some other way if we are to convince ourselves of its primary importance to us. Let us borrow Dr. Young's term. He favours the term "program" because it conveys the idea of a carefully wrought design for performance. Each individual's language is his program for his own experience. Then reading is the encounter with someone else's program. These programs vary in complexity. In reading I use my program to process another one. In doing so I necessarily rearrange my own language, which increases in complexity as a consequence. I have agreed to let the author alter my program and therefore me. This is true even where no unfamiliar word is present. With new words added my own program gains a factor for permutating my perceptual strategies.

While each language program is unique it is also part of a common body of language, and exists by virtue of "local" as well as biological evolution. The sum of common language is a cultural milieu in which individual language develops. The environment into which we are born has been modified by language, and to understand and manage that environment requires familiarity with the language that shaped it. Its politics, religion, customs, clothing, penal system, art and architecture are all related to its language. To function effectively one must function in an environment under perceptual control. The feedback from the environment must be meaningful and reassuring or one will act

like a dog in a library. Our environment is language based. Today the distance between the complexity of our environment and our language skills as a people is widening. The implications of this belong to another paper. For now, we may address the issue of what we call literature (as opposed to, say, newspaper reports or technical writing) in our educational program. The case for reading great or lasting literature is twofold. The accumulated body of literature has been the major force in forming the language we use and literature offers the most complex forms of language structures available for our use. Literature is written by specialists in language. We call those who forge language into original and interesting shapes gifted, while they sometimes call themselves cursed. Whatever we call their talent, it is very probable that their brains are slightly different from most of ours. The gift is not theirs but ours and functions to increase our chances of survival. If you want to learn to play tennis you would do better to watch Wimbledon than to watch me. Literature is what we need. Even a rudimentary survey of the indescribable complexities of language comprehension, like J.B. Carroll's and Ray Freedles' book, Language Comprehension and the Acquisition of Knowledge (1972) will show how basic reading is to the acquisition of language skills. If we believe in the value of reading why not read literature? If I am right that reading is an activity which augments interaction between the individual and the environment, then reading poetry and fiction ought to decrease the sense of isolation which is an ontological condition of being human. The reader's occasional sense of "that's exactly how it is!" -- or in today's "now" talk, "right-on!" or "Wow!" -- is the sign of a discovery of some linguistic formulation that orders a personal experience that was previously not perfectly controlled or understood. When someone else has said it for us it becomes ours. I believe that the excitement or satisfaction of this

is the consequence not of finding out that someone else feels the same way, but of one's own learning how to process the experience through language. The implications of this for educational practice are important. However important "show and tell" is in primary classrooms, children will be limited in their expression by the language levels of their peers. They may come from homes where conversation and interaction have been reduced by television watching. More than ever the school should be a language place. Children should be read aloud to -- frequently, for many short periods. They should be learning poems and sayings, and they could very well benefit from attending language-play sessions for two hours a day from the age of two or three years until school begins. Recent experiments on neo-nates present clear evidence of response to language and especially to the mother's voice. Human beings are ready for language at birth. Is there a guide to nursery rhymes and their presentation, written for teachers of kindergarten and primary schools? Is this research?

To summarize this part of my paper let me quote the famous passage from Helen Keller's autobiography. I know of no other piece of writing that helps us see so clearly the significance of language as a modifier and translator of sense data into human experience.

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Some one was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten-- a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.

I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me. On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken. I felt my way to the hearth and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow.

(from The Story of My Life, by Helen Keller, N.Y. 1903)

In view of current trends in our thinking about cognition, it is difficult not to see this as an extraordinary brain-witness account of synaptic rebirth. If an animal, moving in a world of nameless things, mapped by shapes and smells, could become human, its account of the discovery of language might seek to convey something like this. Is this what we experience in reverse in those stories where princes are turned into frogs? Liquor may be quicker, but the serpent had to have language to bring about the most famous of all seductions. Language is what translates sense stimuli into human consciousness.

You will readily see how little this has to do with "communication" in the popular sense and how much to do with self-realization and consciousness. I became convinced in the last two years, after a cursory explanation of the learning disabilities of the totally deaf, that deafness is obviously the most serious sensory deficit of human beings. In spite of this, the blind remain the popular sentimental favourites of hearing and sighted persons. Herein lies a sign of a general failure to appreciate the significance of language. I was recently told by a psychologist colleague that deafness is only the worst deficit if one uses language as a measure. This seems to me equivalent to saying that a limbless monkey is only seriously disabled if movement is used as a measure of its needs. I am reminded by this of my

trendy colleagues of the 60's, who having acquired Ph.D.s and being widely read and earning substantial salaries, led an attack on their own discipline on behalf of the illiterate.

I have tried to suggest that there is a social and biological imperative for literacy and I am trying to generate an alternative strategy, an alternative set of terms, for those in the language fields who wish to improve the language performance of the population. What research can we do that will enhance this endeavour? I believe that as far as conventional research goes we will have to work closely with departments of psychology and especially those interested in cognitive psychology. Ulric Neisser writes "People do read books, of course, but psychologists have rarely studied what they know as a result of doing so." (Cognition, etc., p.142) Departments of English should help in setting up just such research. How is cognitive power altered by the act of reading a book? We need to know much more about the relations of reading, writing and speaking. We in English departments are in a privileged position to do research on student writing, on possible sex differences and their reflection in language skill and process; and on the correlation between school and university performance. We would benefit from research on the relation between the degree of language skill and television viewing. How is seeing an event a different kind of knowing from reading about the same event? What is the experiential difference in watching a silent film narrative and reading a story? What do we mean when we ask of a story, is it true, did it really happen? What kind of information is transmitted by music, by tone poems? There are obviously innumerable research areas of fundamental importance to the question of literacy and we need a committee or task force to survey and collect data on the work actually being done in

Canadian universities by relevant departments. Perhaps that should be the first piece of research to be funded.

Beyond all such "pure" research, however, there is the need to expand the application of the term "research" to include those areas of work that involve the production of aids to literacy, the instruments of education. For instance, I think we are badly in need of an anthology of recent papers from psychology and the neurosciences that will give teachers of language at all levels some idea of the range of work in this field and its vast implications for their own language teaching. We must overcome the extreme narrowness of interest in all fields. We must somehow persuade psychologists to look up occasionally from their rats and monkeys, to look away from their T-scopes long enough to join with others in areas of enquiry that by their nature cannot be contained within one discipline. And we must persuade our colleagues in the literatures to question their conventional assumptions and to try for some medium of persuasion a little less smug and a little less righteous and a little more informed than preaching to the converted or urging the schools to purge with doses of grammar the ills of illiteracy. "The brain," writes J.Z. Young, "produces language like other types of behaviour as part of its task to keep the individual and his progeny alive,..." (Programs of the Brain, p. 175)

I would add that living for human beings should comprise the most complex, rich and appreciative interaction with our environment that we can imagine. To that end the search for means to generate higher degrees of skill in language must occupy a central place among our various efforts to be alive.

SOME THOUGHTS ON LANGUAGE AND LITERACY TODAY - with homage
to Matthew Arnold

Richard Hoggart

We all know that curious process, rather like catalysis, by which over a period of a few weeks or months a particular theme becomes a preoccupation. That has happened to me in the last few months. Partly it was because I was involved with a debate about the arts and society which is going on in Britain today, usually in a sadly polarised way; partly it was because I had, in preparation for a radio programme, been re-reading Matthew Arnold's reports as Her Majesty's Senior Inspector of Elementary Schools. There were other contributory elements: but the 'phone call inviting me to your seminar was the catalytic moment.

As to Matthew Arnold, I have over these past few weeks formed an enhanced admiration for him. His shade will stalk these few pages. You will remember that he became an Inspector of Schools so as to be able to marry. He had at the start, he said in his farewell speech, no particular interest in the profession:

... though I am a schoolmaster's son ... school teaching or school inspecting is not the line of life I should naturally have chosen. I adopted it in order to marry a lady who is here tonight and who feels the kindness as warmly and as gratefully as I do. (Cheers.) My wife and I had a wandering life of it at first. There were but three inspectors for all England. My district went right across from Pembroke Dock to Great Yarmouth. We had no home; one of our children was born in lodgings at Derby with a workhouse, if I recollect right, behind and a penitentiary in front. (Laughter.) But the irksomeness of my new duties was what I felt most, and during the first year or so this was sometimes almost insupportable. But I met daily in the schools with men and women discharging duties akin to mine, duties as irksome as mine, duties less well paid than mine, and I asked myself, Are they on

roses? Would they not by nature prefer, many of them, to go where they liked and do what they liked instead of being shut up in school? I saw them making the best of it; I saw the cheerfulness and efficiency with which they did their work, and I asked myself again, How do they do it? Gradually it grew into a habit with me to put myself into their places, to try to enter into their feelings, to represent to myself their life, and I assure you I got many lessons from them.

He thought he would probably land a more attractive job soon. But that farewell speech was made after 35 years in the profession! With hindsight, we can say now that he was bound to be hooked. He became an Inspector early in 1851, just before he was thirty. On June 10th of that year, now with a secure stipend, he married. On October 15th of that first year he wrote to his wife from Oldham Road Lancasterian School Manchester:

I think I shall get interested in the schools after a little time; their effects on the children are so immense, and their future effects in civilising the next generation of the lower classes, who, as things are going, will have most of the political power of the country in their hands, may be so important ...

It would be easy to do a sizeable critical gloss on the frames of reference, the assumptions and the tone of that passage. Let me simply say that it is a very decent utterance indeed, as well as clear-sighted.

With Arnold's example always in the background, I propose to look at some recurrent aspects of literacy studies in Great Britain now. It is clear that there has been some gain, especially over the last fifteen or so years. The main advance is that we have become much more receptive to the variety of

ways in which sophisticated communication can take place. We now know that many forms of speech which were previously dismissed as illiterate, ungrammatical or ungenteel can carry a complex range of meanings. We don't even have to say any longer that oral communication among people who hardly ever put pen to paper is interesting and alive only because it is concrete and metaphorical rather than abstract and conceptual. We know that apparently disconnected and uneducated speech can keep in play very elaborate structures of assumptions. We know a good deal more about non-verbal communication. We are more open to a great range of linguistic inventiveness; we almost all now welcome linguistic diversity. All that is a gain — and has become something of a fashion.

So what am I bothered about? I suppose by what can happen to almost any intellectual fashion: that it can temporarily blind its adherents to the limits of its usefulness. Take, for example, linguistic and literacy studies about children. Work of this kind is almost universally marked by a care and concern, a range of generous impulses, which only a curmudgeon would fail to recognise. But good intentions are never enough; generous impulses are never enough; sooner rather than later they are likely to get in the way of the fuller development of the very children these people do genuinely care about.

One often finds in this work a romanticism which expresses itself in that soft-centred phrase: "The artist is not a special kind of a man; every man is a special kind of artist." Of course, I see what is meant and in my time I've drawn aid from the declaration. But it's been so over-used and over-

extended today that it's become a justification for levelling, a denial of the existence of gifts in some which the rest of us don't have, and of efforts by some which the rest of us won't make. So it should now be buried, since it has become the servant of an easy populism. It is related to the single-minded enthusiasm of some people for "grass roots broadcasting" (for which I hope a good future). But the same people do not normally want to discuss the problems of how to structure and finance broadcasting on the national level, and those must be solved if broadcasting is to be a strong fifth estate, casting a critical eye on governments and parties and unions and corporations.

Similarly, work of this kind is often lopsidedly over-protective towards children. It is more fearful of submitting them to intellectual effort than of their straining muscles in, say, folk-dancing. Above all, it is afraid of anything which might be interpreted as a moral judgment. The following typical passage is from a recent English book on literacy and the school child. It is about a class in which a pupil had been rebuked for what the teacher thought was 'lazy' speech. It seems to me that, if the incident is accurately reported, the child had used a lazy form. But the author of this book cannot quite bear that thought. He says:

When language is seriously studied in its own right, it becomes clear just how awesomely complex is the socio-linguistic competence of all speakers. [True: that is what I remarked on earlier. But we do not have to assume that every form of "vulgar" or non-"correct" speech has now to be hailed as an instance of a fluid, diverse, linguistic inventiveness. It might just be lazy, as the teacher said, unless that word has left the vocabulary. The author of this book on literacy continues] And when such a position is reached, it becomes impossible to maintain a position of linguistic prejudice or intolerance.

It is easy to see the linguistic slide here into hurrah and boo words. A teacher has committed the contemporary error of suggesting that some of us sometimes may be linguistically lazy (a sin I for one often commit). The author of this study responds, first, with the not altogether relevant reply that we now know that much hitherto unregarded speech is complex. He then goes on to throw in some pejorative words such as "prejudice" and "intolerance" so as to imply that anyone who doesn't accept every single form of speech as an instance of wholly acceptable linguistic diversity (instead of labelling some with naughty words such as "lazy") is "prejudiced" and "intolerant". It's not a very respectable way of arguing; but it avoids the risk of introducing "moral judgments" into teaching.

What a strange mental world this suggests: what an odd psychological landscape teachers are being asked to evoke for their pupils. It recalls that beautiful poem of Auden's, "In Praise of Limestone" in which, as so often, he evokes landscapes as the symbols of human attitudes. The great bare, raw plains are for the boss-men who want to rule others by drilling them; the harsh peaks are for the saints who want above all to rule their own passions, alone. But most of us like to stay in the comfortable, rolling, suburban, wrap-around, pliable, gregarious, limestone landscapes, where we demand little of others and they do the same by us. The passage I quoted above, and many others like it, are the educational-writers' equivalents of this near-horizontal, limestone-landscape world. The attitude has spread far, and to all levels. The common response by specialists in modern English to virtually any linguistic shift is: "people seem to want to use the word/phrase/part of speech that way; therefore we accept and

incorporate it; there are no other criteria." So the new form spreads like the collared dove.

All these elements, as I am sure you have already recognised, are part of a very much wider process which runs through education of all kinds, through debates about the arts, through all the areas in which in the end we have to come up against questions of values and standards. In open societies where the liberal democratic spirit is still said to be honoured, that spirit, as Isaiah Berlin has discussed in an elegant and almost elegiac essay¹, is so much on the defensive as to be largely disabled — especially to attacks from the Far Left, which are nowadays much more common and just as violent as those from the Right. Berlin notes that it is particularly embarrassing to resist the Far Left since we liberals fear to be caught sinning against the light. So there is a powerful and widespread drag towards finding challenge-free and value-free approaches to all parts of education and indeed all areas of intellectual life; and since language is the most value-laden and value-significant of all our activities, the drag is especially strong there. It is this sense of a trap which must be evaded which gives the main impetus to the spread of such offerings in higher education as "communication skills" courses. If we put all our effort into the mechanics, into how we can communicate with that person or group over there, into the machinery of the process, then we may avoid facing the substance, the what that is to be communicated — for that may be unpleasant or taxing or quite unacceptable to our hearers.

¹ Published as 'The Liberal Predicament' in *Dialogues*, Vol. II, no. 4, 1978. The essay is extracted from *Fathers and Children*.

'To communicate all is to forgive all' is the modern version of an old bromide. Reinhold Niebuhr pointed out thirty years ago that fuller communication and greater understanding of each others' natures might, on the contrary, increase suspicion and hatred. I once had to recommend that a fairly senior UNESCO officer should not have his contract renewed, since his work was well below an acceptable level. The officer pushed aside all specific, itemised failings and summed up the situation as he saw it thus: "The difficulty between me and Mr. Hoggart is a failure in communication". Had we communicated fully, presumably, all the hard evidence of administrative incompetences would have been flushed away in a warm bath of communicative togetherness. I remembered then a story about Prime Minister Attlee, who did not waste time. A Minister he was replacing asked for an interview so as to discuss the reason for his dismissal. He got it. "You have to go", said Attlee, "because you don't measure up to the job".

You will know John J. Rouse's essay in which, drawing support from George Brown's book, *On the Teaching of English in Elementary and High Schools*, he criticises the impetus behind so many of what he calls "skill-com" courses in the USA. The essay is sometimes old-fashioned in its rhetoric, but has a firm hold on the above central point.² Similarly, the late Professor Shaughnessy's work (I know it from *Errors and Expectations*)³ reaches humane, imaginative levels in the approach to the teaching of basic writing which the vast bulk of work in "communication skills" gives no inkling of. Benjamin DeMott's review of that book in *The Nation* identifies just this level

² John J. Rouse: "Knowledge, Power and the Teaching of English." Originally published in *College English*, Vol. 40, no. 5, January 1979.

³ *Errors and Expectations, a guide for the teacher of basic writing*, by Mina Shaughnessy, OUP, NY. 1977.

of importance. He ended:

... the full meaning and resonance of works like Professor Shaughnessy's modest, "technical" volume can't be expected to disclose themselves overnight. We are not accustomed to thinking of a book as a social and moral breakthrough. Still we have duties, and a principal one is to reach beyond the obvious to the true - to see farther than the momentary swings of popular opinion about "declining universities", returns to "basics", and the like. Our duty is to grasp that, because of the character of the society, sometimes even because of its peculiar corruptions, we are placed periodically to advance in knowledge of our brothers and sisters, to feel our way forward into a deeper and more consequential fraternity with one another than hitherto achieved. Caught up in condescension, irony, muckraking, or despair, we often miss the step that our best democratic selves have been attempting, amidst chaos, to learn to take. But such failures of vision need correcting.

In Britain one can begin mounting a precise criticism of such courses by saying that they virtually all ignore, seem not to have noticed, that a central element in communication or non-communication in our country lies in the handling of tone, written or spoken. Almost any English speaker of English is responsive to and able to employ a range of tones of considerable complexity. To look closely at those is to learn a great deal about the power of the sense of class in British life even today, and about its relations to geography, to certain schools and colleges, to a few professions and much else. To the long-established range of tones must now be added some which have emerged during the last few decades, especially in the populist press and the more populist reaches of broadcasting. By now most English popular broadcasters have given up feeling they have to adopt trans- or mid-Atlantic tones so as to avoid the minefields of tone-and-class. We now have our own populist tones — oddly enough, most of them light and high-pitched (for example, Jimmy Young on Radio 2).

But, except for a few specialists, we do not examine all this. If we did, we would be led very much further than most courses in "communications" have begun to imagine.

To come back to the main thread, which is that an adequate definition of literacy invites us, forces us, to recognise that if we try to take short cuts, if we put up with lazy or evasive linguistic practices, we will sell our subjects and our students short. A great many of us have been doing that in the past few decades. As a result what began as a democratic impulse ("let us be student-centred rather than institution-centred or discipline-centred") has become undemocratic, because it has eroded the students' chances of reaching towards the best and hardest. The results show in many ways but most strikingly in the low level of literacy possessed by many in Britain. We estimate that in this country of about 53 million people (the first nation to be able to announce, in the last decade of the last century, that we were on all reasonable definitions a literate nation) there are today almost two million illiterate adults and several million more adults who need basic general education if they are to be able to cope with even the simpler practices of complicated societies, whether in their handling of letters or of numbers. Outside those, there is a wide penumbra of people whose competence is below the level that any society which spends so much money on full-time education should be willing to accept. One cause of this state of affairs, I am arguing, is that many of us who work in education have been guided by ill-thought-out prescriptions. Seeing how badly-educated ^{many of} ~~our~~ pupils then prove to be, some of us excuse ourselves by saying that they were ineducable anyway, and that is why they are now only near-literate adults; and that

can be a self-justifying fiction.

Take another common practice, by which some of us excuse a failure to require students to gain at least something of a sense of history, and a disinclination to bore them with what at first might seem dry learning. The way in is via the word "relevance". That word has been much misused recently so as to justify a great many bad habits and we should declare a ten-year moratorium on its employment. A "relevant" course is one which may be assumed to be instantly exciting to the students: a "non-relevant" course is one which the students may be reluctant to start, since it will be assumed to be out of date or old-fashioned, and hence boring. A few months ago I was speaking to a group of university extra-mural tutors and said something about the need, if you are a tutor in literature, to help adult students read the great texts in English since Chaucer. I added that sometimes today such classes had been dropped in favour of courses in "communication skills" or in the socio-cultural analysis of mass communications. A man stood up and said he didn't at all agree; he didn't see why adult students should be forced to study what I — with a traditionally English literature background — wanted to foist on them as the Great Tradition, and that it was more important to offer them subjects "relevant" to their condition (Is there anything more relevant to their condition than much of Shakespeare?) such as, he added, precisely those studies in mass communications which you have yourself done so much to foster over the years. "That is not what I meant at all. That is not it, at all", I felt like murmuring with Prufrock.

On the far Left, a similar attitude takes the form of rejecting

almost all the usual literary tradition as so much "bourgeois crap", quite irrelevant to the needs of the emerging, grass-roots workers' culture. In so far as such cultural forms may be emerging, good. But there is no sufficient reason why they should be set against an ill-conceived, reductive definition of "high art". But this is what, for example, the clamorous demands that the Arts Council should substantially cut off aid to building-based theatres and the classic repertoire in favour of new, alternative dramatic initiatives display. Yet, as we have seen, liberal democrats in Britain find it hard to take up a position on the middle ground, for fear of being lumped with the contributors to the Black Papers — people who have seen some of these problems, but tend to respond to them in a spirit of alarmed, educational small-mindedness.

So it is more than time to take stock, especially of the full demands of certain disciplines, and of what might be seen as essential parts of our common heritage, and hence of what should then follow as practice. Since time is getting on, let me put some main considerations rather schematically.

First, we have to insist again, and consistently, that words — all aspects of the use of words — matter, and have to be respected. We should therefore, at whatever level we are teaching, require regular writing, and should mark it in detail, thus gradually showing in practice that to write, whether a letter to the local educational authority or a full-length novel, is a considerable discipline, and that probably no other activity so well tests us all round. This is also an essential grounding for the fuller appreciation of creative writing itself, as practised by those who make it their life's

work.

So we come to the literary and linguistic heritage. Matthew Arnold, in his old-fashioned way, used to talk about "touchstones" and "the best that has been thought and said", as essential parts of the intellectual baggage of educated people. Such phrases usually raise a small smile in educational circles today. In Britain, we had a recent example of a similar nervousness, when it was suggested by an official committee that there might be something to be said for "a common core" to the curriculum of all schoolchildren, an attempt to get them to reach agreed levels in some essential areas. The debate which then arose was not deep but was certainly violent. Inevitably, the cry went up: This is French centralism, and wholly alien to the British spirit. I don't think we should be much put off by such routine reactions. In talking about the literary and linguistic heritage no one, so far as I know, is suggesting that we should draw up a list of "the hundred best books which all students ..." and so on and so on. Still, most of us who are middleaged and in educational work do in fact have a good, ^{common} literary background, and few of us would like to think of our minds as lacking that rich seam. It has become part of the way we respond to our own experiences; it sharpens and focusses and criticises and sometimes puts into order our responses. It reveals how other people have made better sense of similar experiences by catching them in forms of language which thereafter stick in our consciousnesses like burrs. Why should we deny anyone willing, or capable of being led to be willing, access to that store? — which is more than a store, since a store is a static repository, and these things become a living part of our engagement with our own lives.

When I began work as a university extra-mural teacher of literature thirty-three years ago there were some in that profession who argued that we did wrong to introduce mature working-class students to Shakespeare and other classic writers. We had to give them — yes — "relevant" literature; and relevant literature was The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists and Gissing and Shaw and Wells. Here is the false setting of things against each other again, and the elision of differences of level. Today their successors are likely to say, again out of well-intentioned democratic impulses, that courses for such people should be not book-based but centred on tape-recorded oral records ... a coal miner's memories of the 'Thirties, a Union meeting in a big factory, a tape-recorded "dramatised documentary" about the lives of working wives.

One thing my five years with the UN — at UNESCO — did was reinforce my sense of the amazing beauty and power of the effort by any individual to face his or her experiences and try to capture them in words, without face-saving or hiding from the self and without trying to woo or coo at anybody else. The fineness of that effort, the demands it makes on us and, sadly, its increasing rarity, I would say — these were all brought home to me with a weight I shall never now shrug off or would wish to shrug off. The conviction came chiefly from visits to the Eastern Bloc because there, although acts of public communication are going on all the time — on radio and television, in the press, on the hoardings, in a flood of public statements, there was hardly a sign of a disinterested, lonely, absorbed, brooding voice. The voices were above all interested, manipulative, cautious, guarded, operational; they had aims but no purposes. But if that realisation began to tempt me to feel in any way self-congratulatory about the West,

it didn't take long to remember that such voices are today having a harder time in the West too, precisely because the liberal democratic spirit is, as I've said, so torn within itself; and also because, and therefore because, the voices which are increasingly riding high in our societies are also the persuasive and manipulative — not so much from centralised government authorities but from a variety of sources, from political parties and unions and above all from many aspects of the market-place. The experience of reading disinterested writing may not make us better people. It may nevertheless lead us to see moral dilemmas in a clearer light; and that could be the beginning of wisdom. Hence, the weakening of these kinds of voice all over the world is a major human loss.

There is not room here to mention other than sketchily another aspect of the business of being in touch with our literary and linguistic roots. I mean the importance of knowing a lot of literature by heart; of having a wide memorised acquaintance from an early age. Here is Arnold again, for the last but one time, as "relevant" as ever:

People talk contemptuously of "learning lines by heart"; but if a child is brought, as he easily can be brought, to throw himself into a piece of poetry, an exercise of creative activity has been set up in him quite different from the effort of learning a list of words to spell, or a list of flesh-making and heat-giving foods, or a list of capes and bays, or a list of reigns and battles, and capable of greatly relieving the strain from learning these and of affording a lively pleasure.

Students now taking Honours degrees in English literature at British universities are, I assume, as intelligent and imaginative as their predecessors. But you have to be careful about making in class what seem useful comparisons

between authors because students are as like as not to say "Oh, Keats? Sorry. We didn't do him at school." And if you try to move out from a hidden quotation in Eliot or Auden or Greene to talk about the associations and contrasts it sets up, you may find that the quotation strikes no chord at all; there is often hardly any comparative literary stock in the mind.

It looks as if later generations will have less and less opportunity to make contact with this past, as though we are steadily losing a language and a literature together. Who will reverse the flow? No one would dare talk today, as Arnold did, about a clerisy. The nearest we get to that concept is in the neutral, social-scientific phrase "opinion formers", and that is not at all the same. Nor can much help be expected from most people in most university departments of literature, in North America or Britain. For those departments have in the last twenty years or so expanded enormously, and at the same time become more and more "strictly professional" in their general outlooks. At what they decide to do, they are often extremely competent. It is their restricted definition of what they should do which gives cause for concern.

To sum up. We are moving more and more into the area where plastic language carries no more than plastic thoughts and exchanges. But the process is about more than language; it is about no less than the definition of democracy, and its survival. It is about the submerging of such movement as there is towards the growth of genuine democracy in an institutionally-centralised populism. The lapse, by intelligent liberal democrats, into an amiable or dry or disillusioned

relativism is at such a time a major contribution to the loss. Arnold noted that by his day the aristocracy had already lost any capacity for leadership of this kind:

Whence, I say, does this slackness, this sleep of the mind, come, except from a torpor of intellectual life, a dearth of ideas, an indifference to fine culture.

He thought, mistakenly, that the middle class might soon take the lead:

A liberal culture, a fulness of intellectual life, in the middle class, is a far more important matter, a far more efficacious stimulant to national progress, than the same powers in an aristocratic class.

The working classes were not ready:

This obscure embryo, only just beginning to move, travelling in labour and darkness, so much left out of account .. will have .. a point towards which it may hopefully work.

Well, it's a slow business, is the ^{very} least one can say. The appearance of a democratically effective and articulate working-class is still a long way off, and a great many forces work against its emergence. Meanwhile we remain both divided and headless; and democracy is more under challenge from within than it has ever been.

These threats, I have been arguing, are highlighted by our weakened sense of the importance of language. We usually forget this because we live in the blind and lucky West. The Soviet and East European dissidents do not forget it because they are fighting for basic human rights, and because they know that in this fight "words alone are certain good", that only in and through the struggle with language will the real radical criticisms be made, and the real possible alternatives be

explored — through poetry and the novel, above all. They have been forced to choose and to fight, or to think themselves less than human; and a few of the very brave have sat, in difficult and dangerous conditions, and written their testaments; and been duly punished. Meanwhile, we stand by and let our own values bleed to death.

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ON LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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Language in its various forms stands at the centre of our conception of ourselves as civilized human beings. Speech, the mastery of oral language, is taken as critical in distinguishing ourselves from non-human animals and from non-normal, that is, retarded or disturbed, human beings. Literacy, the mastery of written language, is taken as critical in distinguishing us from the uncivilized or "Savages", the uneducated or "ignorant", and the young or undeveloped. These rough, commonsensical categories not only serve as basic to our picture of ourselves, they also underlie aspects of our social policies such as the right to vote and the access to jobs and to positions of authority; and they underlie one of our most entrenched institutions, compulsory schooling. It is important therefore to articulate, elaborate, define and criticize these basic assumptions, both for the purposes of creating more just policies and institutions and for improving the practice of the existing ones.

We may begin by noting that written language and literacy skills have at least two major components. First, writing may be used as an alternative to speaking; we may discuss this dimension in terms of the communicational functions of oral and written language. But secondly,

writing is used as a predominant archival resource in a literate society, the means by which important cultural information is preserved and transmitted intergenerationally; we may discuss this dimension in terms of the archival functions of written language. These dimensions are laid out in Figure 1 (see page 74). Both of these dimensions are important in understanding the development of children and the nature of our society, and I shall consider them in turn.

Communicative functions of written language

The communicative dimension is particularly important because in the past, an emphasis on literacy led linguists, psychologists and educators to underestimate the power and subtlety of natural language and oral language competence. Saussure (1916), the father of modern linguistics, was the first to attack "the tyranny of writing", the tendency to use literature unreflectively as the model for language, to construct rules of grammar on the basis of written texts, and to study word meaning exclusively through the analysis of written records.

A by-product of this attention to the written word was a serious underestimation of oral language and oral language competence. Psychologists and educators, for example, on the basis of children's performance on standardized written tests and on their poor performance with high status teacher/interviewers, were led to believe that many children had extremely limited linguistic resources, that they did not know "grammar" and that they had limited "vocabulary" and powers of expression. More recent

		Modality
Function	Oral	Written...
Archival	Formulaic Poetized speech Verse, Song Ritual	Encyclopedia Textbooks Essays
Communicational	Conversation Argumentation	Letters Notes Student papers(?)

Figure 1

linguistic, psychological and educational research has greatly enhanced our understanding of the power and subtlety of oral language competence of the native speakers of any oral language, including that of quite young children. It is now well-known that all speakers "know" a grammar by means of which they generate a set of permissible sentences of a language using the lexical options available in the relevant contexts of their cultural group. Some children, however, may not know the "standard" grammar or the vocabulary relevant to specialized activities such as schooling, banking, concerts, or fine art which may be quite divorced from their immediate experience. Again, although all children know these roles, they may interfere with the productive use of language of some children more than others. Thus although all children must defer to the status advantage of teachers in a classroom, as revealed by the facts that teachers do most of the talking, ask most of the questions and give most of the commands, some children, assigning themselves low status in school contexts, may remain silent, answer only when spoken to and even then in expressionless one-word answers (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Goody, 1978; Olson and Nickerson, 1978).

Let me illustrate the sophistication of oral competence in even quite young children, in this case a pair of 4-year-olds in a pre-kindergarten class named Jamie and Lisa who had some difficulty arriving at an equitable distribution of a limited resource, namely some dominoes. Let us see how they use language to negotiate this social problem.

L: Let's make a domino house out of these.

J: Okay.

First, by grabs.

J: Lookit how many I got....You took a couple of mine!

L: Now you took a couple....

Then, by commands.

L: Now you got to give me three back!

....

L: Now give me just one more and then we got the same.

And then by assertions.

J: Now, you got more than me-e.

And denials.

L: No-o we got the same.

By fact collecting, and assertions and inferences.

L: (Begins to count her dominoes). One, two, three, four....

twenty-eight, twenty-nine (Then counts Jamie's dominoes).

One, two, three, four....eighteen, nineteen...(short pause)
twenty-nine.

J: I got nineteen and you got twenty-nine....You got more
than me.

L: No-o (shouting) I COUNTED....You have the same as me....
We got the same.

J: NO-O-O.

And when negotiations break down again, by grasping.

(There is a shuffle of dominoes across the floor and now
Jamie has more than Lisa.)

And finally by appeal to authority.

L: You got much more than me now.

J: No we got the same.

(Paul, a volunteer teacher, enters the room.)

L: Does he have much more than me?

P: Not too many more!

Note first that almost all of these quite different utterances are attempts to alter or preserve the social arrangement of two children playing together and sharing the limited supply of dominoes. "Now you got to give me three back," a command, has the same pragmatic meaning as "Now, you got more than me," an assertion standing as an indirect request, spoken by the same person. And both speakers appear to be aware of the social meaning, namely, that the listener should hand over one or more of the dominoes, even if in one case it is the explicit "give me" and in the other, the implicit "you have more." We may more clearly see the meanings and intentions expressed if we compare them on two dimensions of meaning, the logical dimension and the social or pragmatic dimension (see Figure 2, p. 78). For the logical meaning, true may be marked with a "+" and false with a "-". For the pragmatic or social meaning, the categories are less obvious. We let "+" represent the preservation of any current social arrangement, i.e., those not requiring compliance, and "-" represent the realignment of any social relationship--statements which require compliance and call for revolutionary activity, so to speak. Now let us examine some fragments of this dialogue in this framework.

Criterion

	Sentence	Gloss	Truth Value	Status-Preserving
L:	"You got more than me now."	(Give me some)	+	-
J:	"No, we got the same."	(I don't have to)	-	+
P:	"Not too many more."	(Yes, it's true he has more but he does not have to give you any.)	+	+

Figure 2

Note that Jamie tells the truth with the hope of realigning the distribution of dominoes. Lisa, technically speaking, tells a lie. (Recall that she was the one who counted them). But her denial was not merely one of falsehood. She knows that if she agrees to the truth of Jamie's statement, she will have to turn over some of the blocks. She doesn't want to do that, so she denies the truth of the statement. Presumably this is what all lies are—tampering with truth value for social or personal ends. Truth, like falsehood, is often socially motivated.

More than that, however, Lisa is not denying the truth of Jamie's statement simply in the service of social ends. Rather she has limited means for simultaneously meeting the social and logical criteria. Paul, the teacher, does. Note his reply when Lisa appeals to him. The presupposition of his sentence is that Jamie has more. Rather than assert that proposition, he presupposes it and uses his sentence to hold that no redistribution is required, presumably on the premise that possession is nine-tenths of the law. And both children understand and accept his comment.

This modest example shows that even quite young children have sufficient mastery of the linguistic resources to maintain a conversation, generate assertions, requests and commands, and agree/disagree or reject/comply with those generated by others. They know alternative means of making statements, commands and requests, and they know that if they don't want to comply with a command, they may criticize or reject the truth of the presupposition or challenge the authority of the speaker. By adulthood, the oral language is fully formed, complex and applicable to a wide variety of tasks and situations. What contribution does literacy make to this linguistic competence?

The imposition of literacy upon this oral language competence may have both positive and negative effects, what we may call the "powers of literacy" and the "tyranny of literacy". The latter were mentioned earlier in the assumption that language competence is literate competence and the symmetrical inference that if someone is not literate, he is not linguistically competent, well-informed or intelligent. And that assumption has political implications if non-literates are excluded from jobs, rights, and public respect simply because of the false identification of literacy with competence.

The "powers" of literacy spring from the distinctive properties of written language including that writing, like the telephone, can be preserved across space, that like the tape-recorder, it can be preserved through time, that it can be revised and edited, and that it separates the producer both from the recipient and from his text. All of these factors permit language to be used for social purposes which are different from those associated with oral language. For example, writing permits reading, re-reading and study. To refer back to Figure 1, one may read friendly letters, but one must study Hegel and other texts that make up the archival form. Does reading and writing without the use of archival forms have an effect on cognitive development? Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole (1978), in their studies of the consequences of literacy among the Vai, a traditional society in Liberia with limited indigenous literacy, found some intellectual outcomes that were directly tied to those literate practices, such as the ability to provide a general topic sentence before elaborating detailed descriptions, but that literacy was not "associated in any way with generalized competencies such as abstraction, verbal reasoning, or metalinguistic skill" (p. 457).

Our own research on the cognitive consequences of literacy and schooling suggest^s that the consequences are more substantial in that schooling encourages a somewhat distinctive "mode of thought" associated with the tendency to pay attention to "what was said" rather than to "what was meant" by the speaker. What is "said" and what is "meant" are more or less conflated in ordinary oral language but they come to be differentiated during the school years. The differentiation may result from either the acquisition of reading and writing skills or from the sustained study of written artifacts including school textbooks. We saw earlier in the Jamie and Lisa episode that a true statement "You have more than me" was not taken simply as an assertion but rather as an indirect means of requesting some dominoes (Olson and Hildyard, 1979). Similarly in some of our memory studies, children hearing stories which ended with similar statements recalled the statements as requests; for example, "She said to give him some". By second grade, around 8 years, children begin to remember both what was said and what the person meant by it: "She said 'you have more' but she meant he should give her some". Attending to what was said independently of what was meant may mark the beginning of an understanding of literal meaning. It is this competence with the literal meaning of sentences which appears to depend upon reading, writing and schooling (Olson and Hildyard, in press).

Comprehension of the literal meaning of sentences is important for some forms of thinking and problem solving. Again I shall provide two examples which show that the literal meaning of "what was said" tends not to be isolated in most oral language contexts. When Jamie says "You have more than me", Lisa could have said "True, but....." What she did, in fact, was deny the truth of the sentence because she did not want to give

up any dominoes. That is, she heard the sentence in terms of a directive -- that is, in terms of its implications for action -- rather than as the assertion which it literally is. If a child says "I'm hungry" or an adult says "Where's the newspaper?" or "My sock has a hole in it," adults frequently do just as Jamie and Lisa did and respond in terms of the indirect meanings of those sentences, that is indirect commands, and reply "I'm too busy to make a snack," "I'll get it," or "Why do you expect me to fix your socks?". But most literate adults are capable of responding to such utterances in terms of their literal meanings, and reply "Good, supper will soon be ready," "The paper is in the hall," "Oh, do you have some others?" The latter meaning, what I have called the "speaker's meaning", tends to be primary in most oral language but it appears to be the only meaning recovered and remembered by children. The same may be true of non-literate adults.

Ruth Finnegan (in press) reports a similar lack of differentiation in her studies of oral poets of the Limba of Sierra Leone: "I discovered that when I was told that two stories were 'the same', this statement meant something other than that the exact words were the same. When I asked a Limba assistant to elucidate the words I could not catch fully while trying to transcribe taped stories, he could not be made to understand that I wanted the exact words on the tape. As far as he was concerned, any comparable phrase with roughly the same meaning would do." (p. 9) That is, there is a lack of differentiation between what was said and what was meant. To repeat, in that writing provides a means of separating a speaker/writer from "text" it encourages the differentiation of intention (what was meant) from the expression (what was said) and an emphasis on the latter.

The ability to separate what was said from what was meant is important in some additional ways. First, it is important to some intellectual tasks. Consider Piaget's famous problem in which a child is shown two ducks and three rabbits and he is asked: "Are there more rabbits or more animals?" The younger child replies: "There are more rabbits" (He should have replied, "more animals"). When asked why, the child says "Because there are only 2 ducks". What the child has to learn to do for such intellectual tasks is to pay attention to the literal meaning of the sentence given, if it is unusual, and compare the two classes mentioned. Such items are common on IQ tests, which therefore can be considered as tests of literacy or preliteracy. Here is a difficult item even for adults: "I have two coins. Together they add up to 55 cents. One of them is not a nickel. What are they?" The answer relies upon close attention to the sentence, "One of them is not a nickel". If that sentence is glossed as "Neither of them is a nickel" the problem is insoluble. If it is literally interpreted, "One of them is not a nickel" does not preclude that the other coin may be a nickel, and the problem is solved. Whether they are merely trick questions, or tap an important and general mental resource remains to be seen, but the ability to solve them appears to be general to schooling and to the acquisition of literacy (cf., Bereiter, Hidi and Dimitroff, 1979). Writing is not merely speech written down, nor is reading merely listening with the eyes. It involves a substantially different, more specialized language code tied to a more specialized knowledge system. A form of language specialized in this way is no longer simply an ordinary oral language, or "mother tongue". It is the language of schooling, and the archival language of the culture.

Archival functions of written language

Written language and literacy may be important not so much because of the uses of writing as an alternative to speaking as because the archival resources of our society are in written form stored in papers, books, and libraries. The acquisition of literacy provides the means whereby children are given access to these resources. Furthermore, these resources are sufficiently important that children are required not simply to read them but to interpret, study and criticize them. Literacy, therefore provides an archival form--a form for the preservation of significant meanings across generations. That archival form has been extremely important to the evolution of our society. - The role of literacy in the evolution of "Modernity" seems to be well-established. On the basis of cultural, historical and literacy-critical evidence, Havelock (1973), Parry (1971), Goody and Watt (1968), Innis (1951) and McLuhan (1964) have argued that the use of written records has altered the structure of knowledge which is stored for re-use, and by implication, they have altered the cognitive processes of the people who rely on that knowledge. Simply put, in an oral society culturally significant information is stored by means of the mnemonic devices of oral memory: rhyme, rhythm and hence verse, song, and formulaic expressions, and imagery. On the other hand, the use of written records for preserving important cultural information both relaxed the constraints imposed by oral memory and encouraged the development of other forms, including the extended expository prose commonly found in encyclopedias and textbooks. Although there are many forms and functions for written language, I shall confine my attention to written textbooks.

We may approach the structure and consequences of essayist prose text by returning to the importance of "sentence meaning" in certain contexts. As I mentioned earlier, attention to sentence meaning is important in differentiating indirect requests from simple assertions. Assertions are statements which are advanced as true independently of their use for making requests. School textbooks are full of such assertions. If children have a bias to treat assertions as indirect commands, as they would, for example, to understand that the teacher's "I hear talking" means "Be quiet", they may have difficulty seeing any point in reading and studying assertions which have no pragmatic implications. The things taught in schools may seem "meaningless". Hence, depending upon whether children assume language is primarily suitable for making assertions and conjectures or primarily for making direct or indirect commands, they will find school texts either easy or difficult.

Secondly, as I mentioned, writing permits the differentiation of the speaker/writer from his text. Not only does that encourage the awareness of the difference between "what was said" and "what was meant" but more importantly, that separation permits the editing and revision of a text in the attempt to make "what was said" an appropriate representation of "what was meant". This attempt, I suggest, gives rise to the explicit, logical prose that is taken as standard in a literate society.

Written textbooks, I suggest, constitute a distinctive linguistic register in that they involve a form of language particularly appropriate to a set of contexts of use including schools and universities, a particular form of interpersonal relations author/authority and reader/student, and a particular linguistic form, explicit logical prose. Let us consider each of these briefly in turn.

As to the distinctive context of use, it may be interesting to point out the degree of dependency of schooling upon books. According to Black (1967), 75% of a child's time in the classroom and 90% of his homework time is centred around textbooks. Nor is the reliance on textbooks waning. It was recently reported (Herald-Tribune, May, 1979) that 90% of teachers of pre-college science have abandoned a "lab" approach in favour of the traditional textbook.

As to the linguistic form specialized for the purposes of expository written texts, there appears to be, first, an emphasis on definitions of terms, that is on meanings formalized through a specification of criterial features and strict word boundaries, rather than upon typically encountered instances. Secondly, there appears to be an emphasis on complete and unmarked grammatical forms, typically well-formed declarative sentences rather than say, imperatives and/or single subordinate clauses. Third, there appears to be an emphasis on explicit logical structure relating clauses and sentences--numbering points, marking assumptions as assumptions, conclusions as conclusions, and so on. The focus upon these aspects of explicitness of meaning reflect the more general attempt to create texts which, like Popeye, say what they mean and mean precisely, neither more nor less than, what they say. It is the attempt to create language which is autonomous, which is no longer simply the expression of the current speaker.

As to the social relations expressed and maintained by written texts, we may begin by noting that texts have authority; they are taken as the authorized version of the society's valid knowledge. The students' responsibility is primarily that of mastery of this knowledge.

The text as the repository of cultural tradition is closely tied to the teacher's use of the "recitation" method, in which children who have studied the text are given a variety of oral questions which serve the function of holding the children responsible for the information "in the text". There is, therefore, a status difference between writer and reader just as there is between teacher and child in the oral language of the classroom.

But how is that authority created and maintained through texts? Durkheim (1965) stressed that through participation in rituals, représentations collective^s were made to appear as powerful, sacred and originating somewhere other than the current speaker. Bloch (1975), an anthropologist, found that in religious ritual conditions, in traditional society, the speaker speaks not his own words but the "words of the elders" and signals these sacred words by the adoption of a special "voice". Both of these features endow the speech with an authority it would not have if it originated in the current speaker. This authority is based on the differentiation of the speaker from the speech. As long as the speech originates with the current speaker, his listeners know that it is just his view or opinion that he is expressing and that it is therefore, eligible for criticism. When it originates elsewhere, particularly if that source is sacred or of high status, it is "above criticism" and believers therefore recite rather than criticize or doubt those rituals. Let us apply this principle to written text.

Written texts, as I mentioned earlier, are devices which separate speech from the speaker, and that separation not only permits attention to literal meaning and permits elaboration and expression but also that

separation in itself helps to put the words "above criticism". When a child reads a text or when a teacher teaches what a text says, the language appears to originate in a transcendental source just as does the ritual speech--it is not ordinary speech and it is, therefore, above criticism.

Like other forms of language, then, texts have both an intellectual function and a normative, social function. When so viewed, ritualized speech in a traditional society and written texts in a literate society turn out to have more in common than they did on the surface. Both serve an important archival function, which is to specify what the society takes to be "true" and "valid" knowledge from which norms of thought and action may be derived. They both help to preserve the social order by minimizing dispute. They do this, however, in quite different ways depending upon, as Havelock (1976) has pointed out, the form in which knowledge is stored for re-use. If stored orally, it takes the form of the memorable — clear exemplars, pithy sayings, ritualized speech and condensed symbols. But, perhaps more important, the knowledge so stored carries great authority because it appears to originate in a transcendental source, or at least in a source other than the present speaker. If stored in written form, this knowledge takes the form of arguments and conclusions sufficiently explicit and qualified as to be above suspicion. That explicitness, I have argued, derives in part from an increased awareness of the words themselves and of their conventionalized literal meaning, but it may also depend upon other factors such as the relaxation of the constraints imposed by memory. But, as with ritualized speech, written, archival texts have an enhanced authority partly because of the split between the speaker and his words and the tendency to take the words, not as the expression of an ordinary

person, but as an authoritative "objective" description. The child's growing competence with this distinctive register of language in which both the meaning and the authority are displaced from the intentions of a speaker and lodged "in the text", may contribute to the similarly specialized and distinctive mode of thought we have come to associate with literacy and formal education.

General conclusions

Current educational practice has evolved a set of procedures which are relatively successful in developing literacy in young children but which have no satisfactory theoretical grounding. A coherent, empirically and pragmatically tested theory would permit an improved level of understanding of current practice but would also permit criticism and improvement of that practice. It could be that current practice is unnecessarily oppressive to children whose language is widely discrepant from the standard literate language. A substantial part of research should be directed to rationalizing, criticizing and revising when necessary, educational practice employed in the development of literacy skills.

It is important further to determine which aspects of "schooled" competence, such as formal thinking, are tied to literacy and which may be achieved by other means, such as dialogue.

It is important to determine what levels of literacy are actually required for various occupations and positions of authority and to criticize practices based on unwarranted assumptions about the relevance of a high degree of literate competence.

It is important to determine what forms of social arrangements underlie a literate society like our own, what the actual needs and uses of writing are in our society, as well as the consequence of either a rise or a decline in the literate competence of the populations.

It is important to determine what forms of activities of children, such as speaking and writing as opposed to listening and reading, are most important in achieving a literate competence and in determining what revision of school structure and practice would be required to encourage those forms of activity.

An adequate understanding of the nature and consequences of literacy on a society and on the individual members of that society, as well as the instructional arrangements appropriate to its achievement, continues to be a vital problem for those of us concerned with education in a literate society.

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PICTURES, WORDS AND A GENERATION GAP

by Vincent Tovell

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

We're often told that if we want to glimpse the future we should look towards California. Well, I read recently that there had been an argument in California university circles to the effect that should students majoring in English vote to remove Shakespeare from the curriculum because he's no longer relevant, then the faculty should concur. Now as a graduate in literature, a generation or so ago, I am, of course, saddened by such an idea, and outraged that so ill-considered a word as "relevant" should have acquired force enough in our time to overwhelm not only valuable tradition but, as it often seems, plain common sense.

But this California debate ought not to surprise us. There are many in this province who'd agree that we're overburdened by our heritage, and that young people should share and share significantly in the choosing of curricula. Never mind that they won't know what it is they're choosing or rejecting. Besides, so the argument would go, they can always get the classics later. In a library. Or possibly on television.

Now I don't know a politician who would actually come out and say all this, but such talk is in the air because it's true that our literacy heritage is heavy, and it's self-evident that in this time of social convulsion and bewildering change, there are choices to be made. A technological society has particular priorities. Are Shakespeare's texts a priority for the Boat People? And in some sense, in this new age of all-transforming technologies, we are all newcomers — Boat People.

When it comes to basic literacy, i.e. basic reading and writing, nobody denies that people need to read and write at least some of the lingua franca of their own

area. But beyond this, reading and writing what? And for what purposes? Is there a consensus? There once was. I suppose we could all agree here that literacy — the skills to record and relay thoughts and experiences intelligibly, passing them on into the library of human experience — literacy in that sense is fundamental to civilization. We know, furthermore, that these skills have been the means to power of most ruling classes. The successful husbanding and manipulating of information has always made the difference for the few who would control the many.

For us in Canada, who are the heirs of the Renaissance, literacy has mattered to everyone. Literacy was the very political condition of democracy; the means to power of a determined, ambitious and expansive people becoming a middle class and sharing power and wealth. We acquired many of our verbal habits and much of our literature from earlier traditions of the spoken word, particularly the religious word. But we soon added to them the essential vocabularies and libraries appropriate to the new industrial world we were creating. Our literacy expanded in response to the necessities of new and different commercial, legal, financial, military and political systems.

Our bourgeois society is not really pluralistic — a mosaic — as we like to say it is. In fact, it homogenizes people. It integrates individuals without mercy into the new whole. It reshapes their imaginations and forcefully directs their energies to the great cause of economic growth. It is the exigencies and the procedures of that expansion, in fact, that establish our educational priorities, and as a result little importance is attached to the humanities, or to what in the past was central in the tradition of literacy — the consideration of abstractions, of philosophies and religion — the attempts we used to make to consider the ends of life. The languages appropriate to technologists are languages of means and not ends. There is no mathematical formula for justice, or beauty or

truth. No chemist can describe the soul.

A hundred or more years ago — whenever you want to date the beginnings of mass industrialization — you can see, looking back, one important watershed. The necessities of capitalism stimulated several new languages: mathematics, for instance (incidentally the Scots, who mastered them on a mass scale much earlier than the rest of us in the English speaking world, used their knowledge of mathematics to build our banks, our accounting houses and many great engineering enterprises). The languages of chemistry, physics, pharmacology and even biology also established their claims, and time — more and more — had to be given them in school.

By the 20th century, our course was irrevocably set: the training of technicians had become the obsession of modernity, scientists and technologists of all sorts, with their new codes and mysteries. They, after all, would extend our mastery over nature. Education would have to take a lesser place.

The old teacher with his language traditions, his Cicero, his sonnets, and his syntax, lost much of what little favour he had had in the public mind. Perhaps written and spoken languages reminded us uncomfortably of the dissonances of the Tower of Babel. We had always been words apart. We supposed — we hoped — the useful sciences would reveal to us our fundamental unities.

But an even more dramatic and fundamental division occurred at this time. Throughout history people had always read pictures — even in caves. By 1900, we'd figured out how to move pictures, on film. That little trick was to prove as profoundly disruptive as any that man had managed before, and more influential perhaps than the managing of moveable type. It was right for the times. Gutenberg had applied the earlier innovation to the holiest of purposes. Méliès made the first film as an amusement — it was about a voyage to the moon. Make of that what you will. In the 20th century, the moving picture has been left mainly to the

entertainers, the hucksters and the businessmen.

Even so — and this is the point of concern here — the circle of knowledge, of information, was suddenly and immeasurably widened. It is widening still. Moving pictures are now seen everywhere in dizzying profusion, conveying a chaos of human images.

By 1990, we will be even more bewildered. Hundreds of TV channels and signals, moving pictures and sounds from all over the world, may become available in North American homes day and night. And if the pattern of individual viewing continues as it has been now for some years (the average is still of some four to six hours a day in North America), it is reasonable to assume that we will have very different children in our midst from any we have ever known. How much time and energy will they have for reading, writing, learning and pondering the implications of grammar and words? And what effect will this blizzard of pictures have on our traditional ideas of literature, or on the social institutions which have historically defined us? I am thinking, for instance, of our laws and our concepts of justice, our forms of worship, celebration and contemplation, our commerce and finance, our politics, our ways of learning and speaking. The changes cannot be other than drastic.

Even now we can spot some evidence of common speech adjusting to the new priorities of this society, the influence of business, the military, advertising and the jargon of computers. All of these enormously powerful elements in our lives have impacted on us as we interface with them day by day, at this point in time. You know what I mean? These are the bottom line. Hopefully, regardless, like, in terms of literacy, I mean..... Just listen some time to the new music of our speech, everyday radio and television and magazines, comic books and pop singers, and technocrats. They're well paid to write and speak that way. Paid better than we are.

A few years ago, I had the good luck to offer a seminar at York University to first year students. I called it "The Selective Eye". Later I taught a graduate course at OISE along the same lines to advanced students — teachers and educators. We explored our video illiteracy: what programs get on television, why and how? Who decides? Who watches, and how? and why? and who recalls what? Our television programs reinforce the main assumptions of the culture; our imaginations are squashed within these assumptions. What are the assumptions? And what does television ignore? What is left out of account?

The courses were an important experience for all of us. I take the view that we are all in need of such exercises in self-defence — cultural ju-jitsu. We have to learn to defend ourselves against the assaults and the manipulations to which we are now inevitably exposed. We need to learn how to live critically in this new land. We need to help children to do so, just as we need their help to do so ourselves.

It is our tradition to instruct children in literature, and to give them some sense of the political, social and religious significance of that literature. By the time they come to school nowadays, they have already given far more time to television than ever they will in their lives to reading. Ought we not to take that seriously?

Recommendations? To Ottawa? It is not more research we need so much as explorations, discussion and criticism in the classroom, among parents and teachers and wherever people gather together. If we are to alter the priorities of a technological society, we must understand it better than we do, know its origins, its nature and its implications. We could consider, for a start, what the moving picture has brought to us, and how it has altered our very ways of being.

Is it idle to dream that with a clearer notion — a critical notion — of the consequences of these technologies, the case for Shakespeare in the curriculum would be self-evident?

Appendix 3
Position Papers, Oct. 20, 1979

I think I have a unique perspective on the question of literacy. I am a professor of English at the University of Toronto, which is, as you probably know, a place where we assume literacy in our students: in other words, we find the teaching of effective writing both difficult and demeaning and confine ourselves to the teaching of works of literature. There is not a single writing course in the entire offering of the Department of English -- except for the course I offer to mature students not working for university credits. That course is permitted because it is not offered for credit and is offered to mature students who, in our perversity, we assume are less capable of writing well than regular day students.

At any rate, I have conducted a course in writing for more than a decade and I am the only faculty member at U. of T. with experience with such a course at Toronto; my students are all high school graduates, some are university graduates; all are taking English as part of some programme or other sponsored by a professional organization to which they belong. They are better educated by far than the Canadian norm -- with a minimum of high school -- have incentive (to receive some kind of accreditation from a professional association), and have maturity and experience of the so-called real world. But in themselves they provide almost a definition of illiteracy in the Canadian context -- or at least, the kind of illiteracy with which we ought most to be concerned.

In preparing for this conference, I had one of the secretaries at the School of Continuing Studies select for me ten examination papers written by my students last May; the papers were selected at random; they include both passes and failures; and bear in mind they represent the best efforts of these students after a year-long course in English composition. Many students drop out of the course; of the 250 or so who begin to do the assignments each year, only perhaps 150 write the examination. So what we have in profile in these examinations is the best efforts of some of the best products of our high schools to be found in the workaday world in Canada. And we find them writing, of Canada in recent years:

"Over the past ten years Canada has seen its people suffer from unemployment in a country that had flourished with employment at all levels."

"My personal feelings is that Canada has, as a whole, acted like a group of strikers."

Of travel in Canada:

"I have travelled from Ontario to British Columbia via rail passenger car approximately 15 years ago."

Defining a complex sentence:

"A complex sentence is a sentence that has such words as and and but plus tells more than one thing."

Concerning the problems of the Canadian economy:

"This strangilization is not yet felt in Western Canada and until it does these western societies will continue to hide behind a wall of fantaisie."

Concerning the virtue of first-hand experience:

"One would read about the people of Jamaica is hostile, when you are on the island I have seen this information to be untrue."

Concerning a compound sentence:

"A compound sentence are two simple sentences of equal importance and are joined by a conjunction."

Concerning remedies for inflation:

"Most of the governments in the western world, in answering to the calls from the citizens, take up increasing responsibilities in all kinds of social programmes."

Listen carefully to this sentence if you are still wondering whether one can define literacy -- or illiteracy -- at all precisely; it concerns the role of business in the economy:

"Business is another group that its effect on inflation cannot be undermined."

Concerning the difficulties of the under-educated:

"Many men and women in todays walks of life suddenly find themselves short in todays every changing world."

Again, concerning travel from part to part of Canada:

"Every year, thousands of people discover how his neighbour lives and what other regions looks like compared to his own."

And finally, on the same general topic:

"The main enjoyment I arrive out of travel is the

opportunity to compare my community with that of the other communities I visit throughout the country."

If anyone here is offended by my citing from these papers, let me make it totally clear that I am not guilty of snobbery, and I do not offer these specimens of the way some of the better products of our high schools -- and even our universities -- write, to make you laugh. I hope to have something of the opposite effect, in fact: these are, I repeat, Canadians better-educated than most, many in very responsible positions in the business world, as you can tell from some of the citations, often quite intelligent -- they are your neighbours and mine, they wish to think seriously about the world about them -- and they are hopelessly handicapped. Many of them manage a bare pass in my course because of their determination to succeed in acquiring a grasp of basic English composition and grammar. But none are ever likely to be in a condition of intelligence and imagination in which their attempts to be articulate confer very much on our society.

But I find their illiteracy interesting for our task here because they demonstrate that neither literacy nor illiteracy is a theoretical matter: literacy, if they could acquire it, really acquire it, would be the nuts and bolts of their lives. As I said, they are highly motivated because -- in opposition to those of whom W. H. Auden once wrote:

But law-abiding scholars write,
law is good-morning and good-night --

in opposition to law-abiding scholars, they know that to obtain a grasp of the correct and effective use of English means effective communication; and that, if you do not wish to reduce literacy to communication, means that when they write they will be understood -- not more or less, but rather fully. Literacy is the same thing as general competence for my students and this accounts for the avidity with which most follow this course; to know how to use the language well means that orders can be transmitted to subordinates, memos written to colleagues, etc., with efficiency and confidence.

But my students, I repeat, are a representative cross-section of the better-educated in our country; and they do not initially possess the writing skills of the literate, not when they enroll in the course -- despite having at least completed Ontario high school or an equivalent. As you are able to

tell from my examples, when they reach the examination -- or pass it -- most cannot really be called literate, even then. These are facts: and I could read to you from, or show you, hundreds more such papers to provide more such facts. And this, I am suggesting, is the illiteracy we ought to be especially concerned about -- even ahead of the so-called illiteracy of English majors or arts students in the universities: in the country at large, in the ordinary life of our society, thousands upon thousands of our fellow-Canadians are unable to use words with any degree of precision, light upon the correct word often only by chance, have only a hit-and-miss knowledge of grammar and hence cannot really connect and co-ordinate their thoughts, cannot develop an idea and in an orderly way deal with its component parts, etc. And I repeat again: I am not describing the drop-outs, the great unwashed; I am describing those who are in management, who are in effective control of the organization of our society. Of the better than 3500 students I have taught in this course in the past dozen or so years, very few were not in positions of responsibility. Is it difficult to say that their lack of literacy is at least as good a way of accounting for the present parlous condition of the economy of our country as the ineptness and bungling of the politicians?

Literacy and illiteracy are real, then; my course would have taught me that, if I had not known it before. Whatever academic disputes we engage in about the meaning of either term, that we benefit from the former and suffer endlessly from the latter must be accepted. It is not a matter of "good-morning and good-night"; it is a matter of success or failure; in the first instance, I mean the success or failure with which one copes with an idea and attempts to provide it with more or less the right expression and more or less the right shape in words. In the second instance, I mean the success or failure of my students as they, thus well- or ill-equipped, cope with their daily tasks in life -- which all demand literacy in an industrialized society -- and suffer painfully from illiteracy. It does not profit my students -- let me label them, the lower- and middle-management people I teach -- that "law-abiding scholars" assure them that they have competence in oral language; if they cannot write adequately, there aren't enough telephones or tape-recorders in the world to help them and us keep our heads above water.

Let me add that, unsolicited, my students offer my course many testimonials each year: what they tell me is, for example, that they feel a new confidence in their abilities by the completion of the course -- even if they write only

as well as those examples I cited suggest numbers do. I mention this to combat another untruth spawned by the academic world recently: Tennyson writes in *In Memoriam* of the attempt by well-wishers to soothe his grief at the death of Hallam:

One writes that other friends remain,
That loss is common to the race.

Tennyson wasn't comforted by this soothing doctrine because he knew what a vacancy there was in his life. My students, similarly, know what a vacancy there is in theirs when they are not even barely literate: last year, for example, I had to undertake many extra sessions evenings and Saturdays to deal with this realization. To use the vernacular, they are prepared to work their butts off to acquire literacy -- whether they do so or not -- because they have no doubt from the outset of its utility. Not being hypnotized by the cloud of relativism that descended on the universities not long ago, they have no reason to suppose that one condition is as good as another -- specifically, that not being literate is as good as being literate.

And a final thing that my course has brought home to me. It is a matter of great interest to me that, again unsolicited, my students tell me often enough towards the end of our year that they have not only improved their ability to use English and have a new and usable awareness of the resources available in the language for *every* writer, but many, who by their own admission have never been great readers, tell me their ability to read has been greatly improved by the course and they are in fact reading not only more keenly and with greater awareness but simply more. I deal with their problems in a very hard-headed, pragmatic way and I make no effort to seduce them into the Acrasia's Bower of Eng. Lit.; yet without my blandishments many of them take the natural and inevitable first step beyond the course by the course's end: with a new foothold in the uses of language, they begin -- barely, so far as I can tell, in most cases, but they do begin -- to look with interest into literature. That is the final point I want to leave with you: combatting real illiteracy is useful in the end because it leaves those in whom the battle has been at all successful susceptible to the enormous world of the free-ranging creative imagination that is literature. And if I believe anything else as much as I now believe that to fight real illiteracy is the most practical thing we can do for our country, it is that the next most practical thing is to take away the swords of fire

that bar the gates to literature: the real future for this country or any other lies in the uncharted worlds of possibility that lie within those gates.

MRS. MALAPROP'S REVENGE
OR
TELEVISION AND LITERACY¹

by
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The survey I did for this conference repeated to some degree a survey I conducted in the fall of 1978. Although not intended to do so, this earlier survey seemed to show that television was lessening the exactness of that relationship between sound and meaning upon which language depends. [The account of this earlier survey will probably appear in the Papers from the 1978 Annual Meeting of the Atlantic Provinces Linguistic Association, should that publication ever see the light of print.]

This second survey² was made last month, September, 1979, and it was a deliberate attempt to examine the effect of television on the students' use of English. One hundred and fifty-eight students had been divided into four groups that ranged in size from thirty-six to forty-nine. Each group was given a list of sixteen words to define. Each list consisted of three words with a frequency of occurrence³ of four in a million, four words with a frequency of occurrence of three in a million, four words with a frequency of two in a million, four words with a frequency of one in a million, and one word which had a frequency of less than one in a million, but was, or was part of, the title of a television program currently or recently on view in New Brunswick. These

four "television" words were beachcomber, holocaust, jamboree, and syndrome. The students were given fifty minutes to define, and ^{to} write an illustrative sentence for each word on the list. They were not allowed to use dictionaries or thesauruses. Each answer was then graded N, if the word was left completely blank, 0 if the student's answer contained no definition or a wrong definition, and 1 or 2, if the answer contained an acceptable definition. Errors of grammar and spelling I ignored, no matter how horrendous they might be.

The percentage of N replies gave me the first result to emerge from the survey. Presumably, a small percentage of N replies would indicate that most students were familiar with the word, whether or not they could define it correctly, while a large percentage of N replies would indicate that most students were unfamiliar with the word. Table A gives the thirty-two words with which the students were thus shown to be most familiar. The words are arranged in descending order of familiarity, as indicated by the N score which is shown after each word. After the N score for each word, I have given the Thorndike and Lorge frequency rating for the word. The four television words are underlined.

It will be noted that, although all four television words have frequencies of less than one in a million, they have smaller percentage N scores and are thus farther up on the familiarity list, i.e., they are better known, than all save two of the words with frequencies of one per million, and are better known than seven of the words with frequencies of two per million.

In defining the words, the students did better with three of the four television words than the low frequencies of these words would lead one to expect. Table B gives the sixteen words which most students defined correctly or, at any

rate, acceptably, arranged in descending order of the percentage of students scoring 1 or 2 for that word. Again, each word is followed by its frequency rating and the three television words are underlined.

From Table B, it will be noted that, despite their zero frequency, the three television words were accurately defined more often than all save one of the words with a frequency of one per million, and more often than all save four of the words with a frequency of two per million. The influence of television appeared more clearly here in that seventeen of the thirty students who correctly defined holocaust mentioned the Jews either by implication (three) or directly (fourteen).

The fourth television word, syndrome, fared poorly; only 13.51% of the students to whom it was given defined it correctly as 'a group of symptoms.' There may be an explanation for this, though time is too short to allow me to give it in full. This explanation may lie in two phenomena. The first is the recent, frequent discussions of Reyes' syndrome in the province of New Brunswick; many of these discussions used the word syndrome as synonymous with 'disease.' Perhaps it is significant that one of the five students who did define syndrome correctly was a first year student, educated in British Columbia. The second phenomenon contributing to the poor knowledge of syndrome may be the fact that the television program in whose title the word occurs does not give a specially clear picture of what a syndrome is.

It was the students' misdefinitions, however, which gave the most interesting results. These misdefinitions appear in Table C, wherein each word is followed by the number of students asked to define it, the number of students who attempted but failed to define it, and the misdefinitions they offered. Television words are again underlined. Let me emphasize that these misdefinitions are my own restatements of

the students' offerings, except that those that are underlined are quotations of students' actual responses.

From Table C, it will be obvious at once that there is what I described after my first survey as a kind of "crazy phonemic correspondence" between target word and its hypothesized misdefinition. To take just one example, I would point out that the target word dearth and the misdefinition death differ in only two phonemes (/dərθ-dεθ/), while dearth and girth differ in only one (/dərθ-gɜrθ/).⁴ Not all the misdefinitions that I have been able to hypothesize come as close as that to the target words that prompted them, but the correspondence is there, none-the-less. And of the total of 652 misdefinitions offered by the students, 294, or just over 45%, can be explained in this way. It seems to me that, as I thought after the 1978 survey, the relationship between sound and meaning is much less precise than it used to be.

From Tables A and B we saw that television does indeed affect our students' language. Can we infer that television is also producing the phenomenon apparent in Table C?

I think we can make such an inference, and I quote part of the conclusion I drew from my earlier survey:

It seems to me that it is the habit of watching television which accounts for the peculiar quality of the misconceptions which emerged from this investigation — their phonemic half-correspondence with the target words. The television viewer pays attention to three things: he watches the picture, he listens to the sound effects, and he listens to the dialog — the words the actors speak. In many television programs, it seems to me again, the dialog is the least important element of the three; one need not listen to it very carefully to follow what is going on.
... . My hypothesis is that the habit of inattentive listening would produce the kind of half-correspondence between meaning and phonemic

realization that I have described above.

Literacy at any level is possible only when the correspondence between meaning and sound is secure and exact. When we watch our television sets, are we watching, among the many other death throes we see there, the death throes of the age of literacy as well? I'm afraid I think it all too possible that we are.

Footnotes

1. To allow me to read this paper in ten minutes, I have sacrificed description of methodology to the presentation of results.
2. I am most grateful to those of my colleagues who helped to survey the students. They were Professors M.D. Chapman, W.E. Cragg, D.R. Galloway, and M.J. Taylor, Drs. E. Gair and R.E. McDaniel, and Mr. W.D. Howard, all of UNB.
3. Frequency ratings are those given in Edward L. Thorndike and Irving Lorge, The Teacher's Word Book of 30,000 Words (New York: Columbia Univ., 1944). The frequencies used are those in Column G, the 'general' frequencies.
4. The phonemics are based on the pronunciations given in Walter S. Avis, and others, eds., The Senior Dictionary (Toronto: Gage, 1973).

Table A

The thirty-two words most familiar to the students, as indicated by the percentage of students who did not attempt to define them ("N").

	N	Frequency
hypocrite		4
monotony	0.00	4
tentative		3
defiant		4
immunity	2.70	3
mourner		4
eligible	2.77	3
valid	2.78	2
jubilant	5.40	2
deplorable		4
tangible	5.55	3
fad	8.16	2
<u>holocaust</u>		
'endorse		3
<u>jamboree</u>		
jovial	8.33	1
murky		2
pertinent	10.81	2
<u>beachcomber</u>	13.89	
vial		2
fallacy	16.22	2
faggot	19.44	2
nurture		3
witticism	21.62	1
malignant	22.45	4
flagrant		2
illicit		3
obstinacy	25.00	4
opaque		3
oblivious	28.57	3
<u>syndrome</u>		
torrid	29.73	3

Table H

The sixteen words most commonly defined correctly.

	% of students giving correct definition	Frequency
jubilant	91.89	2
mourner	86.49	4
jovial	86.11	2
<u>jamboree</u>	83.33	
endorse	80.56	3
eligible	77.78	3
deplorable	75.00	4
fad	73.47	2
immunity	72.97	3
murky	72.22	1
valid	69.44	2
defiant	67.57	4
obstinacy	66.67	4
hypocrite	64.86	4
<u>beachcomber</u>	63.89	
<u>holocaust</u>	61.22	

Table C

Words and their hypothesized misdefinitions.

	Number of students asked to define	Number misdefining	Hypothesized misdefinitions
<u>beachcomber</u>	36	8	
dearth	49	6	death
defiant	37	11	defector (2)
deplorable	36	7	
deride	36	8	derive
			<u>disrupt</u>
edify	49	22	edit (6)
			clarify (4)
			codify
			make edible
efficacy	37	4	efficiency
eligible	36	7	edible
endorse	36	4	employ
fad	49	9	fade (2)
faggot	36	8	maggot
fallacy	37	28	<u>falsehood</u> (13)
			felony
flagrant	36	20	<u>free</u> and easy
			free and easy (3)
			flamboyant (7)
			arrogant (2)
gamut	49	7	gambit
			gist
garish	36	10	garnish (4)
			cherish
			garrison [? "type of army."]
garrulous	37	12	valorous (2)
gesticulate	36	9	<u>suggest</u>
			digest
			meticulous
<u>holocaust</u>	49	15	outcast
hypocrite	37	13	hypercritic (2)

idolatry	49	5	<u>adultery</u>	adultery
illicit	36	10	<u>elicit</u> (4)	explicit
			<u>elusive</u>	illusory
immunity	37	9	<u>community</u>	
indolent	36	8	<u>insolent</u>	insensitive
			<u>immature</u>	immature
<u>jamboree</u>	36	3		
jovial	36	2		
jubilant	37	1		
keystone	49	8	<u>milestone</u>	
languidly	36	11	<u>language</u> (4)	language (3)
largesse	37	10	<u>largeness</u> (3)	largeness (5)
lethargy	49	7	<u>lying</u>	thesis
levity	36	13	<u>level</u> (4)	loftiness (2)
			<u>leeway</u>	solemnity (2)
			<u>license</u>	lethalness
			<u>aloofness</u> [?]	
malignant	49	20	<u>benignant</u> (2)	
monotony	36	32	<u>monogamy</u>	
mourner	37	4		
murky	36	7		
nurture	37	9	<u>nature</u>	nature
oblivious	49	13	<u>obvias</u>	obligated
obstinacy	36	3		
opaque	36	14	<u>oblique</u>	oval
pallid	36	7	<u>palling</u>	palate
			<u>palliating</u>	squalid
pauper	36	6	<u>parishioner</u>	prodigal
pertinent	37	17	<u>important</u> (8)	<u>impolite</u>
			<u>persistent</u> (2)	<u>persistent</u>
			<u>impertinent</u>	
portend	49	8	<u>pretend</u>	pertain (2)
			<u>protrude</u> (2)	tend
qualm	36	15	<u>quorum</u> (2)	quarrel (6)
			<u>calm after the storm</u>	calm
			<u>palm of victory</u>	quash
			<u>quandary</u>	
ribald	36	6	<u>rubbled</u>	trouble
			<u>repair</u>	

rostrum	37	8	roster (4)	<u>robust</u>
rueful	36	12	ruthless (3)	rude (4)
			rough	
ruse	49	6	rouse	rows (/aU/) (2)
			rue	
sanctity	49	21	sanctuary (12)	
sanguine	36	7	consanguineous	serene
			sagacity	San Quentin ¹
sequester	36	3	quartered ('housed')	sequential (2)
<u>syndrome</u>	37	21	symptom	Sympathy
tangible	36	15	tangential (3)	attainable (2)
			tolerable (2)	tractable
taut	36	4	taunt (2)	tempt
tentative	49	22	attentive (5)	tempting
			timely	
torrid	37	24	torrential (8)	turbulent (4)
			<u>terrible</u> (2)	terrible (4)
			frigid (2)	
vacillate	49	8	vaccinate	
valid	36	10	viable	
vial	37	17	evil (4)	vile (8)
			vital	viable
			avowal	wily (2)
voluble	36	11	<u>volume</u> related (4)	volume related (2)
			soluble	gullible
			viable	
winnow	36	3	whinny	worm one's way
			wimber (sic)	
winsome	49	17	whining	whinnying
witticism	37	25		
woodcut	36	9		

1. The student's illustrative sentence ended with ". . . been to sanguine penitensay" (sic). The solution given above was suggested by Mrs. J.E. Kinloch and Cst. R. Lebel, RCMP, each independently of the other. The author gratefully acknowledges their help.

SAYING IT LIKE IT IS

or

"In the Beginning was the Word: In the End was the Euphemism"

by Colin Norman

Queen's University

Mr. Chairman and members of this assembly: given the alarming sagacity of this audience I've decided to tread carefully, and stick to a prepared response. It also makes good sense to stick to subjects I know something about, and in this context that means talking about my study, The Queen's English, published three years ago, and about its aftermath. In the aftermath I reached several thoroughly gloomy and pessimistic conclusions about the present state of and future prospects for literacy, which, since misery loves company, I'll now inflict on you. I'll probably sound a little like some wild-eyed Prophet of Doom and Despondency--perhaps I'd do better simply parading around the room, waving a placard which proclaims that the End is Nigh. In the Beginning Was the Word: in the End will be the Euphemism.

My study concerned how well students at Queen's University--one of Ontario's more conservative institutions, and just up the road from here--wrote in 1975-76. The conclusion, in brief, was that they wrote very badly indeed. The evidence suggested that roughly one third of the first-year student population was virtually illiterate (in the sense of writing badly) and that another third was at best "potentially literate." These results scarcely gave cause for jubilation. And, of course, subsequent studies at other universities have tended to confirm the picture.

But these statistics are old news. I'd like to concentrate on various unsettling aftermaths of the study. They concerned me deeply, and they concern me still.

When I wrote the study I was remarkably naive (I'm not sure I'd have the nerve to write it now). I was duly astonished, for example, that it made the front page of the Globe & Mail, and by the subsequent debate it occasioned. I also made several blithe assumptions--for example, that the schools would relish hearing, from me, what a rotten job some of them were doing, and that some of my colleagues at Quesen's would likewise enjoy a swift rap over the knuckles (that is, Colin Norman telling them how lackadaisical they were about standards of written English). Oddly enough, none of this came to pass. I was mildly surprised when a school administrator, in an article for the Kingston Whig Standard, suggested that I had probably pocketed my grant money, and was now living in Bermuda, but I'll pass lightly over that.

The first serious shock came when I was invited to participate in a panel discussion at a certain Faculty of Education. I delivered my piece to an audience of about 300 student teachers, and was greeted with a faint smattering of applause. Then another panelist entered the fray. What was so sacred about literacy anyway? He tended to feel suspicious of people who wrote well--to feel they were trying to put something over on him. He didn't like articulate people either--they set his teeth on edge, and made him feel uneasy. Wouldn't it be nice, he suggested, if people stopped putting on airs, stopped expressing themselves clearly and concisely, stopped disturbing the psychological peace, and behaved like the rest of us ordinary folk? I've taken a few liberties, but that was the gist of his argument. To my astonishment it was greeted with hearty cheers and wild applause.

That reaction bothered me a little. In writing the study I naively assumed that everyone would agree on the basic premise--that literacy per se was desirable. I discovered that wasn't so. For large numbers of otherwise sensible people the term has pejorative connotations--it's in the same league as catch phrases like "elitist," "fascist," "male chauvinist." Perhaps, indeed, to be literate is to be an elitist fascist male chauvinist, a stereotype hopelessly caught up in the values of the deluded and disastrous past. It's not too difficult to see how the argument would run.

My second gloomy conclusion--clearly related to the first--was that my study had touched some very raw social nerve. It bothered me that the debate which followed was so acrimonious, and that people took such very clear sides. (It bothered me, for example, that the Kingston Whig Standard published a full page of letters under the caption: "Literacy: the Fur starts to Fly.") To put it differently, I hadn't expected a debate about literacy to evoke the same strong feelings, the same emotional rather than rational responses, as say debates on touchy issues like abortion or drugs or civil rights. It struck me that few people on either side looked dispassionately at the actual evidence of the study. Instead the battle lines were drawn the moment the issue was raised.

Furthermore, those who were "for" or "against" often belonged to recognizable factions. I'm reluctant to name them, but in the interests of understanding the phenomenon I think it's necessary. I can think of striking exceptions in most instances, but, roughly speaking, the strong support came from university instructors, from newspaper editorialists, and from some teachers in the schools. The equally strong opposition came from school administrators, from teachers of education, and from teachers of linguistics. All of this came as a surprise to me, and it troubles me to

have discovered rifts in our society which are so deep, so obvious, and so clearcut.

My third gloomy conclusion derives from reading I've undertaken in the wake of the study. For one thing I decided to find out something about linguistics, so that I'd know what some of my critics were talking about. For another--apt punishment for anyone foolish enough to write a study of literacy--I was recently landed with the mind-boggling task of reviewing some sixty handbooks and manuals on composition and prose style. I may never quite recover, but have reached one or two conclusions in consequence.

In essence, I find some of the arguments advanced by modern linguists alarmingly convincing, and they're echoed, from a different perspective, by some of the better writers on prose style. (I'm thinking particularly of two books by Richard Lanham and another, The Reader Over Your Shoulder, by Robert Graves and Alan Hodge.)

Thus: many of us associate literacy (in the sense of writing or speaking well) with using language clearly, boldly, and concisely, without resort to jargon or euphemisms, and typically in the active not the passive voice. We prefer (I'm here borrowing one of Lanham's examples) to write "Jim kicks Bill," and not "One can easily see that a kicking situation is taking place between Bill and Jim," or "This is the kind of situation in which Jim is a kicker and Bill is a kickee." And as literate Canadians we may prefer to say "O Rosemarie, I love you," not "O Rosemarie, my emotions are in a loving situation in relation to yours."

But this preference, of course, is for what linguists (following Nancy Mitford) call "U-usage" as opposed to "non-U usage." Typically it's the language of those who have nothing to lose by expressing themselves clearly — for example, the secure "aristocrats" at the top of the social scale, or those

drop-outs from society who reject its values (Lanham offers some good examples from the lively beatnik idiom of the sixties). It is not the language of the vast majority of ordinary people who have superiors to please, families to support, and jobs to keep. For this majority, as Lanham, Graves & Hodge, and modern linguists point out, there are sound if unpalatable reasons for expressing one's self obscurely or evasively, rather than frankly and directly.

Which can lead to several cynical conclusions--for example, about public reactions to the bold erudite speeches at conferences such as this. Aren't auditors likely to think "It's all very well for them. Most of them have secure tenured jobs at universities or elsewhere--they've nothing to lose by speaking out. And anyway, as experts on literacy they're expected to speak out boldly, lamenting the present state of literacy--that's their social role. But the rest of us have rather different social roles, in which calling a spade a spade might have some pretty alarming practical consequences." I don't like this line of argument, but it's not easily brushed aside. Perhaps the ultimately cynical conclusion would be that "literate" language is the language of free men--and that free men are few and far between, even in modern democracies.

I'll make short work of my other counsels of despair. For example, it's perfectly clear that television, computer language, and the other manifest benefits of technology have changed social attitudes towards books and the written word, and will continue to do so. It's clear to me, at least, that the going conception of education in the last decade has been romantic rather than classical, permissive rather than prescriptive, and with consequences that I find alarming. And it's clear too that patchwork solutions to illiteracy won't work. The causes of illiteracy run as deep as the underlying spirit and concerns of a culture. It's no good issuing injunctions that people

should "be literate"; they're likely to ask, "to what end?", and unless society provides good reasons they're likely to ignore the wise advice.

In conclusion I'll present what is now called a "worst case scenario", one which has its own sinister and insidious logic. It goes something like this:

Why should literacy survive? For the Romans it was a matter of morals; for the Victorians it was a matter of good manners. For moderns it is neither--in fact to be literate is to be ill-mannered if not immoral. Speaking out clearly and boldly is the luxury of a privileged elite, many of whom are nestling snugly in those elitist institutions, the universities. To be literate is to be distinctive, to stand out from the crowd. But for most people in modern societies, merging into the crowd, until you're indistinguishable, makes better sense. Why, after all, educate our children in terms of old-fashioned ideals, appropriate to the bad old European past but now patently outmoded? Literate language is uncompromising, and insists on excellence, but modern societies are clearly based on compromise, on the annihilation of distinctions, and, often enough, on the triumph of mediocrity. Literate language is the language of individuals, but this isn't the age of individuals, it's the age of committees. And we all know what the language of committees is like. In the Beginning Was the Word: In the End Will Be the Euphemism.

When thoughts like this strike me, late at night, I take peculiar solace in examples from the past. Was there ever a golden age, for example, when jargon had yet to be invented? Apparently not. In The Reader Over Your Shoulder Robert Graves and Alan Hodge undertake the charming exercise of tracing bureaucratic jargon back to the clerical bureaucracy of the Middle Ages, and beyond that to the "eunuch slave secretariat of Byzantine times."

That's oddly reassuring. Or they offer the example of Richard Pace, in 1517, reminding us that literacy (in the sense of being well-read) has been suspect all along. He quotes a member of the land-owning gentry: "I swear by God's Body that I would rather that my son should hang than study literature the study of literature should be left to rustics." For some reason that's reassuring too.

Or am I being too optimistic? Perhaps the same gentleman, were he alive today, might suggest that his son should hopefully be in a hanging situation in relation to literature. And perhaps the worst is not so long as we can say, "This is the worst."

One aspect of the problem of literacy which has so far been touched on only very slightly, and which seems to me of considerable importance, is the decline in quality of what I would call public speech and writing. Up until quite recently -- that is, until 25 or 30 years ago -- there was a serious effort to maintain in the public media a relatively high standard of English language. The CBC employed a director of speech who monitored radio broadcasts and generally supervised and advised all speakers on the network. Newspapers and magazines with any claim to quality kept a fairly close editorial check on their writers. The effect was that public language provided a steady, consistent pattern of reasonably good usage which readers and auditors naturally took as a model.

Classical scholars tell us that no ordinary citizens of Rome talked or wrote like Cicero, but the existence of Cicero's works as a model was still influencing writers of Latin in the eighteenth century, and made some difference in the emergence and shaping of the Romance vulgate languages, and in the styles of prose in many European languages. The long tradition of a formal, more literary language related to but distinct from the vulgate was a valuable one: the vulgate regularly infused fresh energy into the formal, and the formal kept a useful limit on the eccentricities of the vulgate.

This fruitful relation now seems threatened by the slackening of the formal standard, especially in radio and television programmes. The catalogue of errors regularly heard in transmissions would be a long one: malapropisms, inept verbal clichés, a mangling or confusion of idioms, including especially widespread misuse of prepositions and conjunctions, and a general looseness and bagginess of diction. Nothing is done *now*; it is done *at this point in time*. It is never likely to rain; there will instead be a probability that conditions for shower activity may exist. We are constantly invited to believe what we are assured is *incredible*, and to accept as reality what we are told is *fantastic*. We have to acquire a new set of meanings for words -- to learn that in hockey, to get physical means to engage in violence. One team has just acquired a new coach; "What does he have to do to instil in his players to win?" asks the sports commentator. Mispronunciations and misplacing of accents are commonplace. One odd habit is to emphasize auxiliary verbs: "The workers *will* strike on Wednesday, and negotiations *are* expected to open on Saturday". For some reason, the subjunctive *might* is avoided, so that instead of "He *might* have been killed" (when he *wasn't*) we are told "He *may* have been killed".

It might be some consolation (or should I say it may be) to Canadians to know that a report from a committee on BBC English, which was made public a week or so ago while I was in London, found much the same set of faults in the English system, and recommended a tightening of the existing control, and the providing of regular advisory service on usage and pronunciation. It would be very useful to have a similar survey and report on our radio and television, with perhaps a restoration of the office of supervisor of speech.

As long as Canadians hear from their radios and television sets, from their politicians and other public figures nothing but the inept, flabby, misshapen prose they now suffer, there is little chance of their learning what is wrong with their own style.

Finally, I must emphasize one last time an old and well-worn theme -- the importance of looking at the whole question of literacy in terms of maxima rather than minima, in terms not of how little in the way of literacy a worker really needs, but of how much he can use. It has become habitual at this conference to refer to King Lear, so I will ask you all to remember Lear's speech "Oh, reason not the need. . . ." The fullest degree of literacy, that which Peter Hunt has called "humane literacy", involving as it does as complete a possession as possible of our literary culture, opens the doors to a fuller life of the mind and of the spirit -- which ideally we should wish for all and strive to provide for all.

"LANGUAGE AND LITERACY"

by G. H. Durrant

My general response to the papers submitted was, at first, to be discouraged. What seems to be needed — perhaps understandably in the context of a task sponsored by a Research Council — is more research into the fundamental questions of language, into methodology, ethnic and minority problems, etc. While I am not Philistine enough to object to any extension of knowledge, I am sceptical about the need to direct more energies into these questions, which are continually discussed by linguists and educational psychologists. Que de questions! indeed.

I wonder whether too much attention is not paid to the difficulties that school-children and students have with their language, and to pedagogical methods of overcoming these difficulties, while relatively little attention is paid to the use of language by those who are most responsible for maintaining its central life — our writers and scholars.

What pedagogical methods can succeed, if they are entrusted to teachers of English (or French) who have not themselves learned to speak and write the language precisely and vividly? And how can future teachers acquire the power of language if they study in the university under professors whose language is pedantic, over-abstract, and pretentious? And how can a deprived minority be helped by native speakers who themselves are incompetent?

Consequently I think that the most important task, for Canada, and now, is to consider the education and professional training of teachers of English and French, including the education and professional training of university professors.

The questions that particularly need attention include the following:

1. What proportion of first-rate well-written literature is actually studied

and made familiar? And how much time is spent, by graduate students for example, in reading, not lively and well-written books, but academic prose written by professors?

2. How much time and attention are given in graduate and undergraduate education to oral exercises? Can "literacy", or respect for language, be maintained by teachers who are not eloquent and accurate speakers?

3. How seriously do editors of journals, university presses, and university tenure committees take the question of language? Are articles in learned journals well written? If not, what are the commonest defects, and how can they be remedied?

4. How far has the cult of measurement made effective judgment of performance difficult in all those vitally important activities which do not lend themselves to statistical methods? And what can be done to restore the authority of experienced and competent judgment?

5. Do professors of English write any better than historians, philosophers, and classicists, or any worse than sociologists? What general linguistic culture (as opposed to linguistic theory) do most of them command? How many Chaucerians have we who can't read Latin? How many eighteenth-century specialists, or specialists in Canadian literature, who cannot read French confidently?

The list (que de questions!) could be extended; but that is enough to make my point, which is another question: Quis custodiet. ..?

Let us examine ourselves, for a start.

Much of the discussion that has taken place has focused on the role of educational institutions in the development of both functional and humane literacy. I want to explore my own assumption that the degree of skill with which language is used, and the extent of knowledge of literature in a society, are affected powerfully and directly by the kind of institutions to which the society entrusts the responsibility for producing and distributing the written word.

In our society the written word is a commodity that is produced and offered for sale on a basis which reflects our assumptions as to the way in which economic activity ought normally to be structured and the relationships that ought to exist between the public and private sectors. While the educational institutions are predominantly public, the publishing activity is almost entirely private. I want to speak briefly about some of the changes that are taking place in commercial publishing activity and to explore some of the possible implications of those changes, primarily in the book publishing industry.

Over the past two decades the book publishing industry, which used to consist of independent, often family-owned and-controlled companies, has increasingly been incorporated into much larger structures. Frequently the result has been incorporation into integrated communications and entertainment industries, which include radio and television broadcasting, the film and sound recording industries, and magazine and newspaper publishing. Often these conglomerates are also vertically integrated, including manufacturing, distribution and retailing or exhibition companies as well.

These changes in corporate structure are producing significant and substantial effects. The interests and priorities of the corporate giants that have now purchased control of most of the major book publishing companies are quite different from those of the industry's former owners. The importance they attach to achieving a high return on their investment is not an expectation that the industry's former owners had insisted upon. The new owners have also exhibited an increasing desire to organize activity across the various cultural or entertainment industries in order to maximize their financial pay-off and reduce risk and uncertainty. In an ideal case the result is a movie, a record, a book (either the original on which the film script was based or a "novelization" of the film) and a serial version that can appear in magazines or newspapers. The level of investment required in such ventures is very high and the result is a tremendous pressure to reduce risk.

The result has been an increasing reliance on winning formulas, and an avoidance of the specific, the unique, and the innovative or distinctive. The search is for "product" that is culturally non-specific, intellectually bland, politically safe, or simply sensational.

Carried to its logical conclusion the ideal is probably the Harlequin Romance, which can be, and is, marketed without ever mentioning either author or title. Harlequin will represent a consummation of the industrialization of the book industry, once the firm has expanded its film production activity and is able to sell sound tracks of the romantic musical score.

Not long ago the federal Department of the Secretary of State hired the Bureau of Management Consulting, a research arm of the federal government, to produce a study of the book publishing industry and recommend appropriate changes in government policy. The assumption made by the authors of that study led to the conclusion that the most responsible and competent book publisher in Canada was Harlequin and that the firm had demonstrated that it

was possible to be quite successful in publishing books in Canada. In the view of the authors of this study, the problems of the other Canadian publishing companies were simply the result of introducing cultural factors into a business activity.

I have been discouraged recently by the news that some of the finest book publishing companies are experiencing financial difficulty. Penguin, for example, lost about £10,000,000 last year; while Random House, which persists in publishing good books, is not satisfying the profit expectations of its owner and is now for sale.

In a country with as limited a population as Canada's the perils of publishing as a commercial activity are even more severe. It is particularly difficult for us to make sure that we continue in Canada to produce books that reflect our own creative ability and our own social, political, economic and historical interests. Just as difficult is the problem of making sure that the best work from the past continues to be available. Fortunately the federal and provincial governments have been unwilling to accept the verdict of the changing marketplace on our literary culture. As a result, production subsidies are provided that attempt to reduce the economic difficulty facing publishers here. However, while such support is necessary it is not by itself the best possible response.

When one looks a stage beyond the production process in which the changes in corporate structure noted above have been occurring, it is also quite evident that the system through which books are distributed has an effect on the kind of written material that is available. So far as I am aware, it is only in France that the academic community has paid much attention to the social implications of the location and content of bookstores, although this interest is now shared by the Government of Quebec and reflected there in legislation designed to ensure that a high percentage of Quebecers have access to high-quality, well-stocked bookstores.

If one looks at the rest of Canada, there are only two or three hundred stores that carry a good, comprehensive range of Canadian and foreign publications. There are an additional two hundred chain bookstore outlets which provide a more limited number of books with particular attention given to the kind of bestsellers the entertainment conglomerates are turning out. But beyond that bookstore system there are 15,000 mass paperback outlets which focus almost exclusively on the distribution of formula material. It is the latter outlets to which most Canadians have access, and from which they will select any books they read. And it seems impossible to me to think about the state of the language in the country, or the degree of humane literacy in the society, without looking at both the arrangements within which books are published and the way they are distributed to the public. Both distribution and production can be affected significantly by public policy, and in a country as small as Canada, government policy is particularly important.

At the beginning of these remarks I said that, while most of our attention had been given to the public educational system, I wanted to turn our attention to the private system through which literature is published. Now I would like to make some comments on the libraries in the school system, which constitute an important market for publishers and provide young people in Canada with an early and important opportunity to develop an awareness of the best of our own literature and that of other countries.

How does the school system perform? In my view, indifferently at best. I visit my son's classroom and find there a long row of old issues of the *Reader's Digest*, along with novelizations of television scripts for the "sit-coms" that are on television every night. Worse still, the classroom teacher functions as a sales agent for a book club that sells the kind of books that seem to offer a very high proportion of stories "just like on TV"

or, reversing the sales pitch, suggesting the published text is "a very funny movie, too." Is the purpose of all this to create good consumers for the corporate entertainment conglomerates or has it something to do with education? The usual rationale offered is that this material represents "easy reading" and will contribute to the development of literacy. And yet the result seems to me to be to provide formula books that are meant to lead to other purchases, rather than to good books and to a knowledge of the best literature. The result, I suspect, is that all this reading imparts familiarity with clichés rather than the information, excitement and understanding that contact with good books might provide.

A second problem that deserves attention is the relative absence of high quality Canadian books from the school libraries. The production of excellent books for this market is not rewarded with substantial sales. A recent study by Professor John Wilkinson of the library school at the University of Toronto found that "titles from Canadian publishers are conspicuous by their absence, and titles (from whatever country) regarded by reviewers as outstanding . . . rarely appear." One wonders why the school library market is not a market for excellence in literature. Given the large size of this market the consequences of this situation for publishers are substantial. The kinds of purchases the schools make and encourage affect directly the kinds of books that are published.

I believe it is important in examining language and literacy in Canada to recognize the fact that the production and distribution of the written word is predominantly an industrial process and that significant changes are occurring in that process. It is necessary for us to decide to what degree our governments can and should accept the consequences of what

will happen if they play no role whatever in responding to these changes. Of course, through the education system, the public library system and existing government programs of publishing support, the government is already involved in a substantial way. What I have wanted to suggest is that there is a need to be more aware of the way in which language and literacy are affected by the present arrangements affecting the publishing process.

English and Other Languages

H. G. Edinger

We are dealing with literacy in English and French and with literacy on many levels, school, college, adult life. The failure to produce literate Canadians that is largely laid at the door of the educational system is most evident from the misuse or abuse of the English or French language. The presence of languages other than English in the system of schooling has hardly been mentioned. Perhaps we assume that it is most rational and efficient to deal with the case of illiteracy in English or French, that once the methods of taming that monster have been developed, it might then be the time to seek more sophisticated and refined levels of literacy by bringing in other languages.

But while the house of English has been suffering its recent dilapidation, other languages have also suffered reverses. The graph of literacy in English shows its downward trend, the graph of the study of other languages in schools moves downward also, and it is difficult not to sense that there must be some relation between them. The fixing of the state of foreign-language studies in schools and universities is easily done by counting students. The passing decades of this century have shown a continuing decline in the numbers of those who enter university with preparation at school in a language other than English of such depth that they can study a culture other than English with enjoyment. (Throughout

these remarks I discount the snarled question of the study of the other official language of Canada and I will refer to English alone only in order to indulge a habit.) The fitful rises but persistent lowerings in enrolments are very closely tied to entrance requirements and degree structures, so that the steady down-grading of time and depth in the study of foreign languages is ultimately the result of decisions taken by educators at some level or another. The causes are given frequently as Budget, Time, and Student Interest, so that Abstractions seem to be at work rather than human beings. The naive observer might nevertheless observe with optimism, using a primitive hydraulic model of the student's mind: "Ah, well, too bad about German or Latin, but the students will now have the time to achieve that easy, lucid command of English that we've probably been keeping them away from by demanding too much other work for a diploma. And they can read translations and of course all foreigners learn English, or they should."

Please forgive the crudity of that sketch. It points to a few of the worries that teachers of foreign languages try to deal with as they ceaselessly monitor, in their professional groups and publications, the place and nature of their teaching. I want to try to make a couple of non-professional points in this general area, the problem of English and other languages.

One point is that the study of living languages has undergone a kind of debasement. The purpose and goal of studying a modern language is overwhelmingly seen by students and by the public

as being almost exclusively the ability to speak that language. That there is a universal day-dream of suddenly, painlessly getting the gift of another tongue is proved by advertising that you must all know quite well. They try to excite you to buy or sign up for Speak-Spanish-Like-A-Diplomat-In-Only-Three-Weeks courses. They often display a picture of the newly sophisticated, no-longer-monoglot North American ordering food for an admiring lady in flawless, diplomatic-type Spanish in a sun-drenched sidewalk cafe. These advertisements pander to a wonderfully practical and useful view of the study of language and, like other dreams, this view can produce bitterness in reality. ("I've studied Spanish for four years in high school and I still can't speak it." This complaint, which I've heard from dozens of students entering university and explaining why they don't want to study languages, is usually unanswerable because the student is truly disenchanted and has never imagined that one could do anything with a language but speak it.) The fact might well be that talking in any language is a rather low-grade motor skill, not best acquired in a classroom. There is, of course, simply no recognition of the wide gulf between speaking a language and being literate in it. It should be granted more widely that the study of foreign languages in schools is not very likely to lead to fluency unless the course is purely for that purpose or the circumstances are exceptional. On the other hand, such study can very well give access to the culture of that language in its literary form. Perhaps that should be the goal. (I am

speaking to a North American situation here, in which it is not commonly possible for a student by travelling a few hundred miles to live with another spoken language for a few months, and I am still discounting Canadian study of the other official language.) Let me ask you to note, in any case, a widespread, perhaps dominant, attitude in which one studies a language only to speak it, not to become literate in it.

Another point is the age at which other languages are available for study. It appears to be true that the ability to learn another language grows smaller with advancing age. Younger children have less resistance, both of capacity and of attitude, to other languages. Yet the pattern now is for the study of languages to begin later and later in the schools, often at university. Students confront another language at the point in their lives when it appears to be more of a task. (The parallel with English that I am hinting at will be clearer if you ask yourself when it is that people discover that they are considered to be somehow illiterate in their native language by those who can judge. Is it not most typically in the first or second year of university, at seventeen or eighteen years of age?) This is a disquieting dilemma. We refashion "priorities" so that students will confront other languages, if they ever do, when they can cope with them less well. They are not enchanted.

I must come to what I believe to be the bearing of these scattered remarks on English. I have no material to show you that it is true in terms of linguistics or psychology or whatever, but for me there is a notional attractiveness in the idea that it is really

quite strange and difficult to study the language that you believe you already know and use with perfect competence. That is, it is difficult to see it disembodied, so to speak, to stand away from it, to treat as an object that which most clearly presents you to the world as a subject. (One of the greatest uses of literature is that when we read another person's writings, we are for a time at least standing outside our own way of using language. I don't mean escapism.) A forceful way of grasping that languages have structures, rules, rights and wrongs, good ways, better ways and elegant ways of behaving, is to look at another language in some depth. If a student is brought even in an incomplete way to respect the genius of another language, would his respect for English not also increase, even if he were not aware of it?

These ideas, not unfamiliar, perhaps, are rapidly presented and hardly argued in detail or at sufficient length. Let me say what might be desirable. It would be desirable not to forget other languages when we rush to repair the house of English. It would be desirable to believe that the decline of the study of other languages is a symptom of illiteracy in English. It would be desirable to combat the attitude that one studies a language at school merely to be able to speak it fluently. It would be desirable to have languages available to students at early stages in their schooling.

I also offer the thought that any means that would increase the understanding of the history of the English language, of its traditions, of its temporal and spatial presence, is bound to be

useful. A university not far from mine has a course best known by its nickname, "Roots," essentially a course in English etymology. It is partly history of the language, partly an increase-your-word-power exercise. Something very substantial along these lines, not precisely linguistics, not grammar, not orthography, not the hundred commonest mistakes, but a respectable and meaty blending of all these and more, might well be developed into a common freshman course, allowing the student to grasp the reasons why his native language is so lovely or so treacherous.

In all these discussions the place of literature and criticism must not be forgotten. Criticism, in particular, appears not to make a frontal assault on any pressing problems of illiteracy. In the emergency that we are trying to register, the pressure will be for practical measures. The critic may be seen to operate at the most impractical level and so be forgotten. But the spectrum of literacy, from minimal accomplishment to the most delicate judging and the most speculative queries, is a unit after all, and it would be contrary to our task not to help preserve that continuum.

Patricia Clements Gallivan
University of Alberta

Mr. Chairman, you asked us when you opened these meetings to be wide-ranging in our remarks and to consider "literacy" in as many contexts as possible. Now I want to speak narrowly, of my own concerns as a university teacher of English, and to be specific.

One welcome fact in the history of what we are still calling the crisis in literacy is that university departments of literature have recognized and assumed a special responsibility for action. In this country, much of what has been done to define and deal with the problem before us has been done by departments of literature. Professors of literature have drawn public and professional attention to the state of affairs (think of *In the Name of Language!*); have advanced the attempt to locate its causes and characteristics (think of *The Queen's English*); have investigated their own values and practices (think of *The Priestley Report*); and have moved to dozens of practical, and remarkably successful, measures intended to stall and reverse it. (I think of the many classes in remedial English which, under the wings of various literature departments across the country, retrieve for their students the possibility of a university education; or of the attempt of the Association of Canadian University Teachers of English to devise, together with the Canadian Council of Teachers of English, a national school curriculum; or, in my local context, which may be representative, of an Arts Faculty Report which has urged and hastened important revisions of curriculum not only in the university but also in the Public School System.) University teachers of literature have assumed responsibility for standards of literacy among our own students, and we have, in more than one province, begun important, broad work with school boards and school teachers at what in Ontario you call the "interface". The list of participants in this workshop is not a reflection of over-specialization in the workshop's composition, but evidence of the proper and inevitable special concern of ^{teachers of} literature with the practical and theoretical problems which are

raised by the crisis in literacy. The very existence of this workshop, I suspect, is a measure of the effectiveness of our concern and our action: literacy is now widely recognized as a matter requiring sustained, broad, serious, urgent attention.

Yet, in spite of their achievements, university departments of literature have suffered in all of this. For having defined the literacy crisis, we are accused of having caused it; for caring for precise language, we are mocked as prim grammarians; for insisting on a definition of literacy which takes into account what Professor Priestley elsewhere in this report calls the life of the mind and the spirit, we are dismissed as faded liberals or condemned as elitist. A recently widely publicised "diagnosis" of the ills in the body of literary studies in the United States tells us that when we teach composition we merely "teach the style, broadly defined, of the managerial and professional classes"; that when we teach literature (transformed in this cant into "high culture"), we merely "propagate the values of those who rule"; that when we engage in literary scholarship or write literary criticism we merely attempt to justify ourselves as professionals and only succeed in confirming our inutility by adding fruitlessly to the "ever-enlarging archive of unread articles and books". Departments of literature are under major attack and it is not a surprise that they are demoralized. The crisis in literacy includes a crisis in confidence at one end of what you have been calling, Mr. Chairman, the continuum of literacy.

I think that literary studies are welded to literacy, and that the state of the discipline of literature is, both practically and theoretically, one side of the crisis in literacy. I think that in the present weather we are in danger of forgetting that. Of course, David Olson is right: literacy must be studied from several viewpoints, submitted to several kinds of investigation. But if, in our recommendations to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research

Council, we neglect the connection between literacy and literature in Canada, we shall help to produce two extremely undesirable consequences: we shall undermine precisely those people who have done most to counter a decline in standards of literacy and who remain in the best position to do more; and we shall help to root the language away from what feeds it. It is of course true that language is politics: women and Canadians know that. But it is not in the study of literature that students learn to take the style of the managerial or any other class: it is there that they learn to observe the possibilities and powers of speech and so to detect the accents of power in the style of the managerial or any other class.

The study of literature in the classroom draws its energy from a robust discipline of literary studies; the practice of literature in the country depends for its quality on the sharpness of the edge of criticism in the country. I think that the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council should assert that its support for literary criticism and scholarship is part of its concern with literacy in Canada.

Geoffrey Stevens

The Globe and Mail

A week ago I was out in Winnipeg at a conference of unhappy federal Liberals from various parts of Canada, and I spent the weekend sitting around as an observer, not a participant, in workshop sessions rather similar to this. As the weekend went on, one of the participants, Gordon Gibson, who used to be the leader of what used to be the Liberal Party in British Columbia, made an effort to synthesize the weekend's discussions and state the problems facing the party. What he said was, "We have experienced a serious distancing from power." When I got home to Ottawa, I was confronted by my eight-year-old son, who said, "Why weren't you here to take me to the football game, where were you?" I said, "Well, I was in Winnipeg listening to a bunch of Liberals." He said, "What were they saying?" I said, "They were saying that they had experienced a serious distancing from power." He said, "You mean the Liberals lost the election?" "You got it."

I want to talk about what I regard as a serious distancing of language from whole communities of its practitioners. What I mean of course is that people whom I regard as literate, even highly literate, are simply, because of changes in society, unable to communicate effectively with one another. I've heard a lot of talk over the last couple of days about the problems of literacy, particularly among students coming into university, and I share that concern. I am maybe more concerned though, about the problem, as I see it, that even the literate man cannot function properly in society today. I'm thinking of the trend to the development of specialty languages in our society. When I was growing up as a child, it was always taken for granted that ordinary people were not supposed to be able to read a doctor's handwriting or understand the jargon of a lawyer; but I think that this development has gone on a considerable distance from that point. Vincent Tovell was talking yesterday

about the development of new languages in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology. From my own personal experience, as one who has had his typewriter taken away and replaced with a computer terminal, I know that there's a whole language of computer science which I am absolutely unable to grasp. I have no idea what these people are talking about when they tell me what I should be doing with this screen in my office. There's a whole specialty language surrounding pop culture; I can't understand it. When I read things like *Fanfare* in the *Globe and Mail* I don't know what they're talking about.

We have a whole new specialty language which covers bureaucrats. Acronyms have become words, to the point where nobody even recalls what the acronym was originally meant to say. We have a rash of euphemisms. I can think of three euphemisms that bureaucrats like to use for firing. Nobody ever fires anybody in the public service, as you know. You can declare him redundant, you can disemploy him or you can terminate him; the end result I think is the same; I am not sure. We never punish anyone, we apply disincentives. If inflation is a problem we will seek to destimulate the economy. If we don't like wherever the constitution is we will patriate it or if necessary repatriate it. We used to nationalize companies, now we privatize them, or in the case of Canadair or De Havilland we reprivatize them. I could go on at some length, but I won't. There have been some new additions though, in the last few months, which I think are worthy of note. If you want to end up with a public service which is smaller than the one that you have at the moment, you attrit it. Attrit is a new verb, one which Sinclair Stevens is rather fond of. If you want to take a crown corporation and give away shares to individuals, you bric it; there's a British Columbia origin in that word.

Turning to politicians, it's a long time since 1948, when Harry Truman used to open his campaign speeches by saying, "My name's Truman, I'm President of the United States and I'm trying to keep my job." Now we have a prime minister who for a period could not get through a sentence without talking

about specificities and totalities. I had an experience a couple of years ago when I was in New Brunswick and I went around to interview Richard Hatfield, who's an old friend. I don't very often use a tape recorder but on this occasion, for some reason, I sat down with a tape recorder in front of me and interviewed him. He made absolutely perfect sense to me. He is a man though, who will start a sentence, get part way through it and then start another sentence, start a third sentence, then go back and complete the first sentence, start three more sentences and then go back and complete the second sentence. If you're talking to him face to face or watching him on television, he makes sense, you know what he's saying. I taped this interview with him and I transcribed it and ran the text, the substance of it, in my column. He spoke to me the next day and he said, "I made pretty good sense, I didn't realize I was that clear." I said, "Well, you weren't. I had to go through that darn text and clean up everything you said, move paragraphs around and sentences around," and I showed him the transcript. He said, "That can't be me." Well, it was him.

We have a specialty language for academics, probably a number of them. I was making some notes yesterday on some of the expressions I was hearing. I have learned about the importance of augmenting discipline in the cognitive process. I understand that there is a need to de-language people and thanks to Joe Gold, I have learned that with new words added to my own program I have gained a factor for permutating perceptual strategies. Now I think the new specialty languages obviously serve a valuable and a valid purpose in that they allow one specialist to convey specialized information to another specialist in the same field. But to mention something else that Joe Gold said yesterday, language is also a defence strategy; it serves to set a profession, an occupation, a discipline, apart from others - to give it an identity, to create a mystique that only the practitioners of that particular profession or discipline can share. In a brief intermission yesterday I was talking about

this phenomenon with someone; we were talking about textbooks and I was trying to say that the further away the source of authority is from the child the more likely it is to be believed and to be respected. I think that the use of a particular language and the discipline which that language encompasses and protects tends to command respect in direct proportion to the distance it is able to put between itself and the language and experience of the rest of society. In other words, the more arcane the more authoritative.

Sometimes, of course, there is an ulterior motive behind the development of a specialty language. I want to quote from this style book put out at intervals by the *Globe and Mail*. (It's the only newspaper in the country that puts out a style book for its writers. This is the fifth edition; it came out in 1976.) The editor of this book was moved to rage by some of the language and the use of language which emerged during the Watergate affair in the United States and he issued this injunction to the *Globe and Mail* staff:

For an examination of the appalling depth to which English has fallen, you should read the White House transcripts of presidential conversations dealing with the Watergate controversy. There you will find distastefully documented, in more than 900 pages, a tragic example of the hopeless failure of supposedly intelligent people to communicate to each other information about matters of great importance. There are thousands of non sequiturs, transposed negatives, double and triple negatives, airy suspension of all grammatical rules governing tenses (the characters sometimes drift off into a wonderland of present tenses when they're actually discussing some options for possible future action, in a lurid combination of Damon Runyon and *The Godfather*), incredible switches of subject in mid-sentence, and a never-ending sequence of clichés and flatulent jargon. In all this compendium there is rarely a properly constructed, cohesive or completed sentence. Read it: you won't like it.

I've read it and I don't like it. It causes me problems as a concerned practitioner of language. I think that my function as a practitioner is to try to translate the jargon of the bureaucrat, the euphemisms of the politician, the obscurities of the academic into clear, clean, concise language that conveys as faithfully as possible the meaning of the specialist and yet is both interesting and understandable to the layman. But I don't think it's enough for the press to serve as a translator. The press has a responsibility for the language. Vincent Tovell mentioned yesterday what to me was a startling fact, that children, by the time they reach school, have spent more time watching television than they will spend reading books throughout their lives. I should add by the way that when I say press, I mean television too. (I don't like the word *media* because I can never remember whether it's singular or plural.) I think the press is custodian of ordinary language, of what we could call the *langue ordinaire*: and like a *vin ordinaire* the *langue ordinaire* must be palatable to the expert and satisfying to the layman. I don't think the press does a good job of protecting the language, of preserving the language, of reminding people that you don't have to be simple-minded to say simple things. Professor Priestley has already used most of the examples that I was planning to use, so I won't go into them; but any of you who read newspapers or listen to television have come across your own horror stories.

I'm afraid that too often the press shows less regard for language than most of those whose words and activities we are reporting. The press clamours for attention. We've developed a language of our own but it's a non-language, a language of stereotypes and hackneyed phrases. I'll give you an example. Edwin Newman in his book *Strictly Speaking* took a pretty good shot at Joe Alsop, the American columnist, and I'll just read you that paragraph.

In May 1974 Alsop wrote a column headed "The Undiluted Horror that Lies Ahead" [this was dealing with Watergate]. The undiluted horror lay ahead four times in the column, once for an interminable period,

and horror un-undiluted lay ahead once. The United States government was described as paralyzed by Watergate four times -- this was the undiluted horror -- and also described as being in the vulnerable state of a beached whale, and afflicted by Watergate mania twice, with the result that what the government was doing about anything was zero, which profoundly imperilled all America's interests overseas and all America's friends overseas

Alsop concluded his column this way: "Altogether if the undiluted horror does not lead to far greater disasters it will be proved that this country is in God's own care." That's what passes for journalism in this country.

We talk about the need for students to get back to basics. I'm not going to defend the press; I think there's the same need for the press to get back to basics. I'll go back to something which S. E. Leslie said in *The Round Table* and which I think is worth submitting: "Language not only clothes thought, it helps to shape it; if one is corrupted the other cannot escape infection. Vigour, directness and simplicity of speech argue -- of course they do not wholly prove -- some corresponding quality of thought. They may also serve to show up by contrast the vulgarity of verbal display and specialist word-dropping. Let the jargoning sociologists and political scientists, yes and theologians and economists and lawyers too, keep their occupational words legitimately behind barriers in their own phosphorescent caves, and let the men of the media see that they do."

I think that's my assignment.

